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ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SIXTH SERIES

SELECTED BY

J. W. MARRIOTT

EDITOR OF "GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS"
"THE BEST ONE-ACT PLAYS OF 1937" ETC.
AUTHOR OF "THE THEATRE" ETC.

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON TORONTO BOMBAY SYDNEY

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FOREWORD

THE first series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, which appeared in 1924, was the first of its kind to be published in this country, and although the need for such a book was suggested by the Board of Education's new attitude towards the teaching of English the success of the volume surpassed the most sanguine anticipations. Four more volumes followed quickly, but although during the last ten years other editors and publishers have produced rival collections, the demand is by no means satisfied. There must be at the present time several dozen volumes of one-act plays intended for school use, as well as a number designed for a more sophisticated public. And there are more to come.

The publication of these collections (miscalled 'anthologies') of short modern plays has been justified by results. Obviously it has supplied a definite need, but—possibly less obviously—it has done much to stimulate, or even to create, the need which it immediately supplies. "Appetite comes with eating," as the French say, and at no time in our history has there been so much reading of plays as at the present day. The ability to enjoy a printed play is an acquired taste. "Once the idiom of play-writing is grasped," declares Mr Sladen-Smith, "there is no more fascinating pursuit than play-reading. It may become almost a vice. Other types of reading, the novel especially, seem flat and tedious in comparison."

The recent revival of amateur drama has done much to restore the one-act play to favour, and the teams competing in the annual tournaments arranged by the British Drama League and the Scottish Community Drama Association are always on the look-out for the right material—not so much the play which is easy to act as the play which has sound dramatic qualities. Hundreds of new one-act plays are being written every year, and an editor's function is to discover the most meritorious.

There is also a growing recognition of the value of drama in the school, and the study of the modern play is now regarded as the natural starting-point in teaching what has come to be termed 'dramatic appreciation'. During the last few years speech-training has grown more important, and the teacher is no longer content with the recitation of poems and the reading aloud of extracts of standard prose. The production of a play is so much more 'vital', and the psychological effect of acting is from an educational point of view invaluable.

For the youngest children it is necessary to discover plays in which the dialogue keeps within the range of a limited vocabulary and which deal with comparatively simple emotions and ideas; but for older pupils, including the adolescent, there is no need for specially written plays—merely for specially chosen plays. The plays intended for schools must be the best, and nothing less than the best is good enough. A professional cast can make a second-rate play appear impressive, but the team of young amateurs must practise on a play so efficiently made that it is capable of surviving the worst that may happen to it.

The segregation of the sexes in many schools creates a difficulty: there are few satisfactory plays for boys or girls only. A girl will satisfactorily undertake a male role in a fantasy or a costume play, and a boy can take a girl's part in a Shakespearian scene (as the Elizabethans knew); but in a modern play dealing with contemporary life such changes are less desirable.

Something might be said about plays written for a cast of women only. There is a demand for plays of this kind, but although the supply is continually increasing, the general standard is still maddeningly low. It is no compliment to women, nor is it true, to assert, as so many of these plays do, that women's interests are trivial. There exist two notable full-length plays for all-women casts, *Nine till Six* and *Children in Uniform*, and in neither is the absence of a man sensibly

felt. One of the points—perhaps the point—of a play with an all-feminine cast is that a man would be intrusive. Man's absence from a girl's school is obviously right; his absence from a milliner's shop is satisfyingly contrived. One might add also *The Rebellion of Youth*, an amusing example of how to tell a dramatic cautionary tale. By virtue of its many good acting parts and its sound doctrine *The Rebellion of Youth* stands high among unpretentious plays for all-women casts.

It is less difficult plausibly to exclude men from a one-act than from a full-length play, yet one is too often conscious that the men have been deliberately eliminated from a cast which should naturally have included them. I venture to suggest that the following three-play bill fulfils the first essential of integrity without men, and possesses the variety of a well-composed programme—historical drama, modern industrial tragedy, and modern well-dressed comedy. The plays suggested are: "Women at War," by Edward Percy (in the present volume); "The Great Dark," by Dan Tothoroh (*The Best One-Act Plays of 1933*); "Smoke-screens," by Harold Brighouse (*The Best One-Act Plays of 1931*).

The plays in the sixth series have been chosen for their dramatic merit, and though none of them has been specially 'written down' for youthful actors they are all suitable for intensive study or for school production. Some of them are quite new. Others, which are a few years old, have been included because they have been missed by other editors and are clearly too good to be neglected.

J. W. M.

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WOMEN AT WAR

A PLAY FOR SEVEN WOMEN

By EDWARD PERCY

CHARACTERS

LADY (ALTHEA) SHOALES

NAN SHOALES

MISTRESS NEVE

MISTRESS BAREBEGOD

DAME URSULA CLIBBUTT

MISTRESS DROOD

PHILADELPHIA WITCHETT

*The scene is the oak-beamed parlour of my Lady
Shoales' house in the village of Appledore, in Kent, on
the 17th of June, 1645.*

Copyright 1934 by Samuel French, Ltd.

MR EDWARD PERCY has written, or collaborated in writing, more than a dozen plays, such as "Ancient Lights," "Slaves All," "The Fiddler Played It Wrong," but his most successful so far have been "The Life and Misdoings of Charlie Peace" and "If Four Walls Told," the last of which is immensely popular with amateurs.

Some playwrights are primarily interested in the construction of a good plot and regard the characters as subordinate to the action; but it is obvious that Mr Percy creates the characters first, and allows the theme to evolve from them. The dialogue is always psychologically and artistically 'right': the women are all clearly differentiated, and form a character-design which is satisfying. The play moves with fluent ease, and apparent ease of achievement is an indication of mastery; but whether that mastery is due to hard work or sheer inspiration one can never guess.

The title "Women at War" may give the impression that the play is either an anti-war document or another study of feminine hostilities. It is neither of these: it is a seventeenth-century picture which, like "Richard of Bordeaux" and a number of other recent historical plays, has significance in the twentieth century.

/

WOMEN AT WAR¹

You see an oak-beamed parlour whose long, low window overlooks a bright garden. There are doors to right and left. The furniture is handsome and all of oak. On the central table is a pile of white linen and clean rags. NAN SHOALS, a pretty girl of the better class of the period, enters with a bunch of roses, which she lays down on the dresser. She then takes up an earthenware pitcher and goes out, returning in a moment with it filled with water. She begins to arrange the roses. PHILADELPHIA WITCHETT enters with an armful of old clean sheets, which she lays down on the table with the other linen. She is a young serving-woman, buxom and outspoken, very downright.

PHILADELPHIA. Here's a bundle of old sheets from Mistress Dood. They're in holes—most of 'em. But they'll do, I dare say. And I hope to God the holier parts goes to the King.

NAN. Philadelphia!

PHILADELPHIA. Oh, I know in *this* house one has to bottle oneself up till one be like a toad blowed out with air. But I must e'en vent a little now and then, for safety's sake.

NAN. Well, don't let my mother hear you. That's all.

PHILADELPHIA. 'Tis fair contrary in my lady to be so out of it all. Why can't she take sides like the good Englishwoman she is? Fight it out and shame the Devil, say I! And if there be bloody noses and bloody polls—well, it adds a bit o' zest to life, anyway. I ben't afeared of fisticuffs—not I!—and culverins and mortars and mines be on'y fisticuffs on a grand scale. I'd as lief my man wore a breastplate as a jerkin—for all that

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street New York.

they're awkward fashions to court in, as my poor ribs knows!

NAN. There's no sense in this civil war. If 'twas the French or the Spaniards 'twould be a horse of another colour—but to fight your own countrymen, your own neighbours, your friends—brother against brother it is in some parts—for the sake of a silly proud king or an upstart farmer like Master Cromwell—why, it's crazy!

PHILADELPHIA. General Cromwell, if you please, miss.

NAN. Master is all he'll get from me, Philadelphia. Master Cromwell and Master Charles! We'll bring 'em both down to earth. For three years we've seen trade die, honest work wither, and the only flourishing industry in the country the making of widows and orphans! Can you wonder that sane people like my mother won't be in either camp?

PHILADELPHIA [*a little abashed*]. Oh, I know it's my lady's goodness of heart persuades her to it. But it's very un-English in her to be out of a fight.

NAN. Pray God the whole business finish soon! They say the King's men are due to meet the Parliament's army in Northamptonshire any day now.

PHILADELPHIA. Ay, and there's some Appledore lads there—on both sides too. I'll lay they lam each other. Why, there's Philip Neve, for one, in the King's forces—more fool he!—and Hallelujah Barebegod from the heath that carries a pike for Oliver. I'll warrant Mistress Neve and Joan Barebegod will be at each other's throats this afternoon—like *her* son and *her* husband up north. I think your mother takes a great risk asking 'em to meet.

NAN. My mother's one idea is to get all folk together in kindly, peaceable work that's for the good of both sides. Is it her fault the men have all gone mad?

PHILADELPHIA. Mad, quotha!

NAN. Yes, downright mad. What's all this pother about tonnage, poundage, ship-money, and the like, the rights of Parliament and the people or the rights of kings? [*Then, after a moment, wistfully*] What is it to

a quiet life among the sheep and the streams and the giant skies, to the light on the marshes in the morning or the light on the hills in the evening? Nothing but a great noise and roaring.

PHILADELPHIA. But for them as *don't* like a quiet life there's a lot to be said for it. Troops passing, and canons and horses to and fro, and stout lads marching—ay, and one's heart marching alongside 'em, bless 'em! And then the news! I'm all a-tiptoe when the posts come in.

[LADY SHOALES enters. *She is a dignified woman, masterful in a quiet way, but with a strong sense of humour as well as sympathy. She is richly but not gaily dressed. She carries several pieces of peeled wood cut into short lengths.*

LADY SHOALES. Martin has cut me these staves. They're the very thing the regimental surgeons are wanting to mend broken bones. I think they should be padded and stitched over with linen—so—though they say that's not necessary. Oh, these apothecaries!

NAN [*holding up the torn sheets*]. Look at these sheets Mistress Drood has sent up!

LADY SHOALES. I think I'd speak of them reverently, Nan, as one does of the dead. Still, they'll come in, I dare say. Joan Barebegod has given me three nearly new napkins.

NAN. She is coming, then?

LADY SHOALES. Oh, she's coming. She said that as I'd asked her in God's name she'd come for His sake if not for mine.

PHILADELPHIA. Did she—the Devil take her!

LADY SHOALES. Philadelphia!

PHILADELPHIA. Does she think she's the only person on speaking terms with the Almighty? I'm inclined to the Parliament boys myself, but I can't stomach such cant!

NAN. Does she know Mistress Neve will be here again?

LADY SHOALES [*smiling*]. She knows very well.

NAN [*coming and kissing LADY SHOALES*]. I think my mother's a miracle of tact. I don't know how you contrived it. They're sworn enemies since the last sewing.

LADY SHOALES. I'm a baronet's widow, don't forget, Nan. When *you* are you'll find plenty of unlikely people ready to come to *your* house. As to they're being sworn enemies, that's all the more reason why they should meet occasionally—poor souls! Besides, Joan knows that if she doesn't come Mistress Neve and *her* party will be getting ahead with the King's bandages, and the Parliament will be nowhere in Apple-dore! [*A knock is heard.*] Who's that?

NAN [*peering from the window*]. Old Dame Clibbutt, Mother.

LADY SHOALES. Quick, Philadelphia! And let us have out the malmsey and the comfits. And you may bring in your own sewing, if you like.

PHILADELPHIA [*with a rapid curtsy*]. Thank you, my lady. [*She goes.*]

NAN. Now we shall hear of all the doings in the marshes in the old Queen's day, and how she once danced with Sir Walter Raleigh!

LADY SHOALES. Yes, she's outstayed the Golden Age—like a December pippin.

PHILADELPHIA [*reappearing*]. Mistress Clibbutt—if it please your ladyship.

[*DAME CLIBBUTT enters. She is an old woman, nearly eighty, but almost gaudily dressed and exceedingly sprightly for her years. She carries a black crook-handled stick and a fur muff. Her costume is more James I than Charles I.* PHILADELPHIA *withdraws.*]

LADY SHOALES [*taking her hands*]. Well, my dear lady, and how do you keep?

THE DAME. Badly, my dear, like a poor conserve. I'm a handful of dry bones held together by my stomacher.

NAN [*drawing up a chair*]. Come and sit you down, Dame Ursula.

THE DAME. Still at your good works, I see. [*She sits.*] I tell you frankly I haven't come to sew. No, no, I'm much too blind. I've come to talk. To talk and to laugh—if there's a laugh left in England to-day.

LADY SHOALES [*significantly*]. If!

THE DAME. The country's going helter-skelter to the dogs. Things are very different to what they were in the dear Queen's time. The plain truth is, England does better when there's a petticoat on the throne.

LADY SHOALES. I wonder if that's true?

THE DAME. Ay, it is; for a good king must be a coward at heart, and women are clever cowards, whereas men are brave as lions and haven't a scruple of brain between a dozen of 'em. Look at these King and Parliament affrays! We've had four years of it. Turning the country topsy-turvy for a parcel of whimsy notions! The King's a fool and slippery as an eel—as any grandson of Mary Darney's must be!—and t'others are crop-eared knaves. Queen Bess'd have knocked their heads together. Ay, or else have knocked 'em clean off!

[*PHILADELPHIA enters with a tray on which is a decanter of wine, some glasses, and dishes of comfits.*]

NAN. Heads may fall yet, Dame, before the business is over.

THE DAME. Well, a head sans brain is no great loss, child.

PHILADELPHIA [*flaring*]. No, not if it be a king's!

THE DAME [*drily*]. Nor a goose's belike, child.

LADY SHOALES. Philadelphia!

PHILADELPHIA [*with one of her quick bobs*]. Your pardon, my lady.

[*She goes.* NAN is sitting on a stool at the DAME'S feet. LADY SHOALES is behind the table cutting out bandages.

LADY SHOALES. The pity is some of them didn't fall before the business was begun.

THE DAME. Better an old head on the block than a young body lying in a field. [*With a laugh*] If this goes on I'm like to lose the last of my lovers! And as for Nan—why, my dear, it may mean eternal spinsterhood! A very ugly combination of words, as your Devonshire parson knows—he whose song you gave us last week—about plucking roses.

NAN [*looking up with a smile*]. Master Robert Her-rick?

THE DAME. That's the man. Though I fancy his eye's a touch too roguish for his cloth. I hope he'll publish his verses one day. How does it go?

NAN [*singing*].

“Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow will be dying.”

[*PHILADELPHIA enters with a large wickerwork basket.*]

PHILADELPHIA. Here's the Parliament basket, my lady. And Mistress Neve's coming up the path.

LADY SHOALES. Put it down by Mistress Barebegod's chair, Philadelphia. [*She does so and withdraws.*]

NAN. “Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.”

THE DAME. “For ever tarry...” A pretty song for women to sing with all the men at war. I remember Sir Walter Raleigh saying to me when we danced together at New Romney after the Brotherhood and Guestling¹—Oh, in 'eighty-five it must have been; I was a chit of a girl then—

PHILADELPHIA [*reappearing*]. Mistress Neve—if it please your ladyship.

¹ A very ancient ceremony still held in the Cinque Ports.

[MISTRESS NEVE enters, a thin, stately woman, simply but royally dressed, an obvious King's woman. PHILADELPHIA goes. LADY SHOALES rises and kisses MISTRESS NEVE. NAN rises and curtsies.

LADY SHOALES. Welcome, Kate.

MISTRESS NEVE. Thanks, Althea. I find welcomes rarer to-day than they were a year ago—before the King's luck 'gan to wane. To-day all I get is a bellyful of black looks. Even my own men frown at me, as if I'd the evil eye.

LADY SHOALES. Do they? At you? "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

MISTRESS NEVE. Oh, every dog has his day to-day. Last night, as we sat at supper, a great stone came flying through the open lattice on to the table.

LADY SHOALES. A stone?

THE DAME [*interestedly*]. Stone-throwing, eh?

MISTRESS NEVE. It smashed the blue bowl of Venice glass that my brother gave me. Lucy was cut on the lip by a splinter. The poor child bled for an hour.

THE DAME. Od's bodikins! Did ye have the rogues whipped and stocked, eh?

MISTRESS NEVE. 'Twas too dark to see who threw it. Roger ran out, but he found no one. That's what we may all expect if these horrible Ironsides have the best of it.

THE DAME. I thought the marshes inclined to the King, though the Parliament's fleet holds the Channel, and they do say that if his Majesty wants to receive a very particular message from abroad it has to go through the smugglers at Rye in a barrel of brandy!

MISTRESS NEVE [*bitterly*]. There's a loyalty that lasts just so long as the weather's fine. When the east wind blows. . . . Did you hear the Vicar of Stone in Apple-dore Church on Sunday? Oh, Master Marten's a trimmer! He means to be safe in either event. A year ago he was King's man to the backbone.

[PHILADELPHIA enters with the second basket.

PHILADELPHIA. If it please your ladyship—the King's basket.

LADY SHOALES. Set it by Mistress Neve, Philadelphia, and thank you. [PHILADELPHIA obeys and goes.

MISTRESS NEVE. Which do we make to-day, Althea—bandages or slings?

LADY SHOALES. Whichever you please.

MISTRESS NEVE. I think bandages are the more generally useful. I shall go on with them. [*Her eye catches sight of the first basket.*] Does that mean the Roundhead woman will be here again?

LADY SHOALES. It does.

MISTRESS NEVE. Really, Althea, I think you carry your impartiality too far.

LADY SHOALES. But, Kate, aren't the Parliament's men men too? Can't *they* suffer? We womenfolk must do our sewing, as it were, under a flag of truce. I don't ask you to make for them. And those of us, like myself, who profess nothing, will divide what we make between you. Can you ask fairer of me than that? Let's get away for half an hour from both King and Parliament—and study what we have in common.

MISTRESS NEVE [*with indignation*]. What have I in common with Joan Barebegod?

LADY SHOALES [*quietly*]. Humanity.

[*There is a short pause while they continue sewing.*]

LADY SHOALES. Have you good news of Philip?

MISTRESS NEVE. I had a letter come yesterday. There was a post through from Leicester. I have it with me, and I'll read it to you when I've worked a spell.

LADY SHOALES. Is he well?

MISTRESS NEVE. He is. Our last batch of linen reached them safely. He sends the surgeon's thanks, and says they cry out for more. It is those things they most need—linen and drugs. The townsfolk and villagers are very good in the places they pass through, but everywhere linen is scarce. Some housewives have given all their bedding. Others have hidden theirs with their plate.

NAN. I think I'd rather sleep between sacking than have sick men at my door without the wherewithal to ease them.

THE DAME. Specially if they was gallant young captains with kiss-curls!

PHILADELPHIA *[entering]*. If it please your ladyship—Mistress Barebegod's come.

[JOAN BAREBEGOD enters. She is a fine-looking woman of about thirty, very plainly and severely dressed. Her manner is prim and formal, but she is hearty enough beneath it.]

JOAN. I fear I'm late, but, as God would have it, the bees swarmed.

[NAN and LADY SHOALES rise to greet her. The others remain seated. MISTRESS NEVE averts her face.]

LADY SHOALES. Oh, the afternoon's young yet! I hope you took them.

JOAN. We did. The Lord sent us a mighty swarm. Eli was sharply stung about the head. He does not take tribulation in the right spirit. Is it bandages to-day, friend?

LADY SHOALES. As you like. Mistress Neve is making bandages. And here is a pair of splints to begin your basket. And a pair for you too, Kate.

MISTRESS NEVE. Thank you, Althea.

JOAN. The Parliament thanks thee, friend. *[Glancing at MISTRESS NEVE]* I have a prompting within me to make slings.

PHILADELPHIA. Will it be meet for me to fetch my needle and my little bit o' sewing now, my lady?

LADY SHOALES. Why, yes, child. Mistress Drood is not come, but we shall hear her if she does.

PHILADELPHIA *[bobbing]*. Thank you, my lady.

[She goes.]

LADY SHOALES. Have you heard from your husband lately, Mistress Barebegod?

JOAN. Not these three weeks. Hallelujah is a poor correspondent; but when he does write there's a ring to his letters like the Psalms of David.

THE DAME. Now, if I married again I should choose a husband who could write like the Song of Solomon.

LADY SHOALES [*laughing*]. Dame!

THE DAME. "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair. . . ." No one will ever say that to me now. But fifty years ago it wouldn't have been an over-statement.

JOAN. Methinks it ill becomes an old woman—a *very* old woman—to speak lightly of Holy Writ. Besides, we know that Solomon, when he wrote that, had no woman in his mind at all.

THE DAME. If you mean to tell me that a man with three hundred wives could ever be *without* a woman in his mind——

[*The rest of the sentence is drowned in general laughter. JOAN BAREBEGOD looks shocked and displeased.*]

MISTRESS NEVE. Since Mistress Barebegod is so jealous of her Bible there's a text I'd commend to her: "Touch not the Lord's anointed."

JOAN. Be it far from me, friend, to bandy words with thee. But thou knowest it is also written: "The letter killeth; the spirit maketh alive."

THE DAME. And, as Will Shakespeare has it, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose"; so we get no further that way.

[*PHILADELPHIA enters. She carries her own small workbag and a little pile of bandages, which she takes to JOAN. Then she picks up some linen and sits sewing.*]

PHILADELPHIA. I've made these out of my last year's petticoat and in my own time, Mistress Barebegod, and I would have them go to the Parliament.

MISTRESS NEVE. Well!

JOAN. Thank thee, friend.

MISTRESS NEVE. It seems to me, Althea, that the impartiality of this house errs in favour of General Cromwell.

LADY SHOALES. I've no control over the maid's opinions, Kate. It was of myself and Nan that I spoke. If Philadelphia wishes her own contribution to go to the Parliament, to the Parliament it must go.

JOAN [*putting them into her basket*]. 'Twill gain me what I lost through my bees being so hasty.

MISTRESS NEVE. I think 'twould be wiser if green girls kept their opinions to themselves, or else followed those of their betters.

LADY SHOALES. Why, Kate, all Appledore knows that Philadelphia is only for the Parliament because young Nick Boorman is groom to General Fairfax!

THE DAME [*chuckling*]. Is that so? Ha, the wench blushes!

PHILADELPHIA [*hotly*]. Well, what better reason can any girl have for taking part in a quarrel than being on the side of the man she's—fond of?

MISTRESS NEVE [*moved*]. God knows that's true enough!

JOAN [*severely*]. Methinks she has espoused a great cause for a very light inducement.

THE DAME. As women ever will. . . .

LADY SHOALES. I sometimes wonder whether any cause is so great as the mighty hearts that champion it.

MISTRESS NEVE [*vehemently*]. The King's is!

JOAN [*contemptuously*]. The King's! [*Working herself up as she speaks*] A tyrant who has sold his people again and again to the Scots, and brought over Irish soldiery to butcher our men, who denies us the right of speech or of rule or of freedom to worship God as we think best! Nay, friend, the King's cause is a little cause. But the cause of the people is a great valiancy, a battering against injustice and oppression, priestcraft and kingcraft—

MISTRESS NEVE [*quietly*]. And a throwing of stones at helpless women whose men are at the wars.

THE DAME. Ah, if Queen Bess had married and gotten a son we should have been spared these chip-chop times.

NAN [to MISTRESS NEVE]. Didn't you say, mistress, that you had a letter from Philip? Mayn't we hear it?

MISTRESS NEVE. I've no heart, Nan, to read my lad's letter to an unfriendly company.

LADY SHOALES. Kate!

JOAN. Now, the Lord be with thee, neighbour! When all's said and done I'm a woman—and a mother too, though my imp can but tug at my skirts. Read thy letter in peace and in God's name. I'll sit mum, I promise thee.

MISTRESS NEVE [*icily*]. I'm sure I'm obliged to Mistress Barebegod.

[*She takes out the letter and unfolds it.*]

THE DAME. A letter from a lad at the wars! How my heart used to flutter over 'em in the old days!

MISTRESS NEVE [*reading*]. "My darling little mother—if, madam, I be not lacking in respect so to call you"—lacking in respect!—"we are quartered in fair comfort here, and I am to thank you and the Appledore ladies on behalf of our chirurgeon for the linens and dressings you have sent. They are much needed by those of our troop that have wounds, yet are not laid by. In truth, we cannot have too many, for of all these things there is a great and increasing scarcity." [*Looking round the room*] And that is thanks to all who sew for the King's basket.

LADY SHOALES. I think we may take it as a soldier's thanks to those who sew for either.

MISTRESS NEVE. "We have much riding to and fro and foraging; and I doubt not but one day soon we shall meet with the enemy and sting him soundly." Pray God you do, my son!

JOAN. Nay, that's very provocative.

MISTRESS NEVE. "He"—that is, the enemy—"is in Northampton now, Cromwell and Ireton in command—good men, both, but suet."

JOAN [*indignantly*]. Suet!

THE DAME. It fits 'em! By the Lord Harry, it fits 'em!

JOAN. Suet, forsooth!

MISTRESS NEVE. "I would you could see our Prince Rupert. He is as I would have every general be—bold, dashing, and yet wary, with a light in his eyes too that it does your heart good to behold. I would the King left more to him, for he has gifts that would have won us this campaign thrice over ere now; but the King muffs all."

JOAN. Ay, that's very true. The King muffs all.

MISTRESS NEVE. I would ask you to hold your tongue, Mistress Barebegod, in accordance with your promise. "They do not grow roses in Leicestershire that will vie with ours in Kent; but the lasses are fully as pretty, and freer, I think, with their kisses."

THE DAME. And I'll warrant his judgment is the outcome of experience!

MISTRESS NEVE. "The corn promises well, particularly the wheat and the barley, if we do not spoil too much. These men we are fighting are fine fellows, and methinks there is little at bottom divides us."

LADY SHOALES. And that's the truth!

JOAN [*shaking her head*]. No, he's wrong there.

MISTRESS NEVE. I too think he's wrong. Philip's overyoung to understand politics. "They fight like men possessed. They have, I feel, an inward faith that matches our outward allegiance very prettily. There are some Appledore lads amongst them. One, Jack Squire, that was taken a few days since tells me Hal Barebegod is in Cromwell's army—him that sang so shockingly through his nose and had the pretty wife."

LADY SHOALES

NAN

THE DAME

} [*laughing*]. Oh!

JOAN [*confused and pleased*]. God bless the boy for calling me pretty! Though 'tis vanity in him and in me. But Hal does *not* sing through his nose.

MISTRESS NEVE. "It is quiet here and hot, but the stillness and the heat are not those of the marshes."

and I am sick for the long lights and the long shadows. I would give a guinea to hear the redshank call, but that it might break my heart. Oh, Mother, I am weary of war! At best it is a bad business. Commend me to my sisters and to Roger. Teach him to be a King's man, but teach him too to be England's man. They may not always mean the same. From your ever-devoted son and servant, Philip Neve. If Jess pups keep me a dog-whelp."

[There is a long silence after the reading of the letter; the women are too moved to comment. At last JOAN speaks.]

JOAN. Thy son writes well, neighbour.

LADY SHOALES *[rising and pouring out the wine]*. I pray you have him home with you by the harvest.

MISTRESS NEVE. Philip will not come home till the business is fixed.

JOAN. Nor my Hal neither.

THE DAME. 'Twill take some fixing—this business betwixt suet and a muff!

LADY SHOALES *[as NAN and PHILADELPHIA hand round glasses of wine and the comfits]*. Kate, will you not drink a glass of malmsey wine? After so much reading your throat should be dry.

MISTRESS NEVE. I will, Althea, thank you. *[She raises her glass.]* God for King Charles!

JOAN *[raising hers]*. God for the Parliament!

LADY SHOALES *[quickly stopping the rivalry]*. God for us all! *[There is a long pause after they have drunk.]*

THE DAME *[nibbling a comfit]*. You long promised me the secret of these French ratafias, my dear, but my Jill is still agog for it.

LADY SHOALES. I crave your pardon, Dame! I've had it in my mind a hundred times since you asked me. The secret's very simple. Let her make them as she makes your macaroons, but, instead of using only sweet almonds, they must be mixed half sweet and half bitter. And be sure, when she pounds them with the white of egg, that she don't let them oil. That's all there is

to it. Will you tell Jill how vexed I am for my forgetting it?

THE DAME. Half sweet and half bitter, and let them not oil? I shall remember.

MISTRESS NEVE. Now you've sown your recipe broadcast, Althea, for I've been taking a note for it, you may depend!

JOAN. I too, though I'm no lover of the French and their ungodly cookery. Still, if I rebaptize them it may be I'll purge them of their vanity. They'll be "Kent comfits" on my table.

THE DAME. So long as you make 'em toothsome I shan't scold you if you call them "Cromwell's Kisses."

[There is a laugh at this, in which JOAN joins.]

They are forgetting their political differences.

LADY SHOALES. Mistress Barebegod has a prescription for coriander biscuits that would set your mouth a-water if she told it. Come, neighbour, fair's fair, I've given you a notion. Do you give us one.

THE DAME. Coriander biscuits? They will be for the colic, surely?

JOAN. Oh, they're a grand remedy for the colic, for the hiccough, and, indeed, for all diversities of the wind, though they eat as a sweetmeat. Thou takest four eggs, but the whites of two only, four spoonfuls of orange flour well dried and an ounce of coriander-seeds. Together with a pound of fair sugar. Beat them together for an hour by the clock, and then mix in a pound of flour well dried and an ounce of coriander-seeds. The whole thou must bake in a temperate oven till conveniently short.

MISTRESS NEVE *[interested]*. I' faith, that's the very prescription I had from my Aunt Bates of Yalding, but that she is for the addition of cinnamon, or of ginger if the cinnamon be not favoured. And, indeed, we do make it with ginger ourselves.

JOAN. The ginger may be well enough, I dare say. But methinks it complicates the flavours unduly. And

good cookery, like good religion, should strive after simplicity.

MISTRESS NEVE. Nay, there I'm with you! There's no more passionate Puritan in a kitchen than I.

LADY SHOALES. And you have a recipe from the great Sir Kenelm Digby himself, I think, Kate.

MISTRESS NEVE [*laughing*]. Yes, I have his directions for a plum cake. It cries for sixteen eggs, three pounds of butter, a pint of good ale, half a pint of sack, and a pint of cream, and I know not what beside!

JOAN. Lord! A very kingly cake! As Royalist as the great chemist himself! He's in France, so they say. . . . [*MISTRESS DROOD enters excitedly.*]

LADY SHOALES. Mistress Drood! You're late. The King's basket has missed you.

MISTRESS DROOD [*out of breath*]. I could not stay to be admitted. Have you heard the news?

SEVERAL. News? What news?

MISTRESS DROOD. Why, there has been a pitched battle between King and Parliament in Northamptonshire. The King has triumphed!

MISTRESS NEVE. God be praised!

MISTRESS DROOD. There are three thousand rebels slain, and twice as many taken. Generals Cromwell and Ireton are being brought to London in chains.

JOAN. I'll not believe it! Who brought the news?

MISTRESS DROOD. Dick Quailes. It's just come through to Tenterden.

JOAN. Oh, I know these Tenterden rumours!

LADY SHOALES. What else?

MISTRESS DROOD. That was all Drood could get from him. Dick's at every ale-house on the road, and now's too happy to talk.

MISTRESS NEVE. Oh, if we could but know 'twas true!

JOAN [*significantly*]. Ay—or false.

LADY SHOALES [*shaking her head*]. Somehow it doesn't ring a-right.

JOAN. Cromwell and Ireton taken! When in every

line of Master Neve's letter there's the King beat written as large as life!

MISTRESS NEVE [*indignantly*]. That there's not, madam!

JOAN. I'll not believe it. God cannot have deserted us so shamefully! [*Realizing what she has said; in confusion*] That is—I should say—so unaccountably. I'll take no news from a drunken tinker. Why, Dick Quailes in his cups would deny his own mother!

MISTRESS NEVE. You may well say that. You would have sung a different tune if he'd brought news of a Parliament victory. I grant you Quailes is a drunken lout, but Fate chooses strange mouthpieces at times! This is what we've prayed for through the quiet nights. [*Fervently*] I thank Thee, O God, for Thy great and overwhelming mercy! [*There is a pause.*]

LADY SHOALES. Right or wrong, there'll still be need of our work. There's no defeat without wounds, no victory without wounds. . . .

[*There is a long silence as the women return to their sewing. Then NAN begins to sing very, very softly:*

“Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:

And this same flower that smiles to-day——”

[*There is the quick drumming of galloping hoofs, growing nearer and nearer. The women start and listen intently.*

PHILADELPHIA [*running to the window*]. A post! A post!

LADY SHOALES [*also at the window*]. The Parliament post!

[*The hoofs stop. All except MISTRESS NEVE and JOAN crowd round the window.*

MISTRESS DROOD. He's stopping!

NAN. Dismounting!

[*PHILADELPHIA runs from the room, followed by NAN.*

LADY SHOALES. Nan, Nan! . . . [*She follows eagerly.*]

MISTRESS DROOD. He has a bulletin in his hand! See, he's nailing it to the inn door! [*She hurries out.*]

THE DAME. A Royalist would have nailed it to the church.

[*She too goes slowly, leaning on her stick. MISTRESS NEVE and JOAN are left alone. MISTRESS NEVE goes on quietly working. JOAN, you can see, is itching to follow the others.*]

JOAN. Art thou not going too, neighbour?

MISTRESS NEVE [*proudly*]. My son's troop has need of these.

[*JOAN glances at her for a moment; and then returns, with equal dignity, to her own sewing. There is a long pause; then PHILADELPHIA enters excitedly.*]

PHILADELPHIA. A Parliament victory! A Parliament victory!

[*She crosses the room and hurries out by the other door. Murmurs and shouts from without can be heard. The two women try hard to appear composed. MISTRESS DROOD enters.*]

MISTRESS DROOD. The Parliament have beat the King at Naseby! Three days since! He's fled towards Scotland! It's a rout—a rout! There's five lads from Appledore killed.

JOAN [*rising, almost beside herself*]. Who? Who?

MISTRESS DROOD. John Humbleshaft of Ridge Farm, Peter Wickham, young Philip Neve by a bullet through his heart— [*Realizing what, in her excitement, she has let fall*] Oh, Mistress Neve, what have I said?

[*MISTRESS NEVE stiffens in her chair, white and stricken.*]

JOAN [*impetuously: she is agonized*]. And my man? My man? Is there news of Hal?

[*MISTRESS DROOD looks at her, tries to speak, but cannot, then covers her face with her hands and rushes from the room. JOAN sinks into her chair, and stretching out her arms on the*]

table before her, leans her head upon them and, after a moment, bursts into a storm of weeping. For a few seconds MISTRESS NEVE does not move. Then she reaches out her left hand and gropes along the table for JOAN's fingers.

CURTAIN

MR HAROLD BRIGHOUSE is a prolific writer of plays, both long and short, and no collection of modern drama can afford to omit an example of his work. The difficulty is to decide which particular example is most characteristic, for Mr Brighouse is extremely versatile, and has mastered many forms. He wrote tragedy in "The Northerners" and farce in "The Odd Man Out," but on the whole he follows the tradition of British drama in choosing comedy—especially the sort of comedy which derives from character—*e.g.*, "Hobson's Choice," "Zack," "Mary's John," and "What's Bred in the Bone." In writing one-act plays he exhibits an even wider range, from an old morality, "The Apple-tree," to the grim drama of "The Price of Coal," including a number of charming fantasies for open-air performance, such as "The Ghosts of Windsor Park," "The Laughing Mind," and "The Prince who was a Piper."

What is the essence of drama? Is it action, suspense, conflict, accelerated movement to a climax? No two critics can be found to agree on a definition, but "The Dye-hard" holds the attention because one wants to know Tom Murgatroyd's ultimate decision. In "The Stoker" the struggle is external and visible; in "The Dye-hard" it takes place within a man's mind, and only a deep insight into his real nature will enable us to anticipate the outcome. Mr Brighouse keeps us guessing, as, in altogether different circumstances, Mr Shaw kept us guessing the final decision of Candida.

THE DYE-HARD

A COMEDY

BY HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

CHARACTERS

TOM MURGATROYD (36), *a yarn-dyer*

MR CHADWICK (50), *owner of a yarn dye-works*

WALTER FARNWORTH (26), *owner of a rival
dye-works*

SUSAN MURGATROYD (28), *Tom's wife*

ALICE BUTTERWORTH (30), *her friend*

*The scene is the Murgatroyd's sitting-room,
Blackton, Lancashire.*

THE DYE-HARD¹

The Murgatroyds, TOM and SUSAN, have just finished midday meal on a Saturday in summer. They live in a small house with a small front garden on the outskirts of Blackton, Lancashire, and they have a better conceit of themselves than to eat in the kitchen. The sitting-room has plain colour-washed walls, window C., and door up R. leading to the lobby. Its furniture dates from the Murgatroyd's marriage, six years ago, and is presentable, if standardized. It includes a sofa. The pots on the table indicate that while SUSAN is on normal diet TOM has eaten slops.

SUSAN is going out shortly, and has already changed from her early morning to her afternoon dress, over which is a brightly printed overall. TOM is fully dressed, except that he has neither slippers nor boots. SUSAN's coat and hat await her convenience on a chair.

TOM [*pushing chair back from table*]. That's fine. It's good building food, is porridge. I've heard it called the Scotsman's meat.

SUSAN. With lots of milk it might be bearable.

TOM. I don't agree with you, not about milk. In my opinion milk's a drawback to porridge. It spoils the natural flavour of the oats.

SUSAN [*with irony*]. And water's a good drink. [*Offers cigarette from packet.*] Having one?

TOM. No, thank you.

SUSAN. Well, I am.

[*Lights and begins to move dishes from table.*]

TOM. That's all right. I've said it before, Susan, and I say it again. You alter nothing. You eat as usual

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

and go about as usual. You haven't got a war on, and I have. It's my war, not yours, and there's no cause for you to suffer.

SUSAN. You admit you're suffering?

TOM. By not smoking? Nay, I'm master of that.

SUSAN. I'm glad to hear that, Tom. I needn't go on with my idea that the sight of me smoking and the smell of tobacco set the craving up in you.

TOM. Don't worry.

SUSAN. And it's the same about meat? I don't deny I've felt awkward about me eating meat for dinner and you supping porridge. When a man sits at home all day he can't help sniffing the smell of cooking. I've thought many a time you must find even smells trying when the oven wasn't smelling for you.

TOM. Ach! It's a pleasure.

SUSAN. What's a pleasure?

TOM. Watching you going about the house doing the things you do every day and I never see you do when I'm at the works. I'm coming to the conclusion that household jobs were specially thought out to display the grace of a woman.

SUSAN. Don't talk so daft.

[She has collected dishes on to tray, and goes to door.]

TOM *[reaching door in advance and opening it]*. Allow me.

SUSAN. And you know what I'd allow you if I hadn't got both hands to a tray. *[Exit SUSAN.]*

[TOM grins, then sees the cigarette packet on table, goes to it, notices that it is nearly full, begins to take out a cigarette, then firmly puts it back. He goes to sofa and lies down. SUSAN returns, carrying his boots.]

SUSAN. I've a free hand now. *[Puts boots on table.]*

TOM. I lay down without my book. I'll be obliged if you'll pass it across.

SUSAN. Reading, reading, reading. *[Reading the book's title] The Theory of Aniline Dyeing.* As if you didn't know all there is to know about that.

TOM. I don't deny I know practical side of it. Only I'm not in practice at the moment.

SUSAN. Whose fault is that?

[Brings book; stands over him.]

TOM. Am I mistaken, Susan, or did I hear you say you and Alice Bulterworth were going to the pictures this afternoon?

SUSAN. We are.

TOM. Then don't let me detain you.

SUSAN. It's early yet. You heard me saying something since then. You heard me say I'd a free hand now. And if you'll cast your eyes on table you'll happen see what's there. [TOM looks angry.] Nay, Tom, Tom!

TOM. It's no good, Susan.

SUSAN. I'll go down on my bended knees and put your boots on if you'll let me.

TOM. No.

SUSAN. Tom!

TOM. I'm stopping at home.

SUSAN. Saturday afternoon and all.

TOM. Makes no difference. I keep on telling you I'm at war. And if I can't bang that into your head I'll bang this. I'm unemployed, and I know what every unemployed man knows: go out walking and you come home hungry.

SUSAN. Oh, Tom! As if you were one of them!

TOM. Luckier than most, I know that. I've got a home worth stopping in and a sofa worth lying on. I've got resources, but I'm not squandering them. I'm ready and willing for a long siege, and it'll not be me that breaks at the end. It'll be young Walter. And you can oblige me, Susan, by putting those boots back where you got them from, or I'll go out with them myself and—

SUSAN. I want you to go out. It's so bad for your health to—

TOM. I'll go out and leave them at the pawnshop and walk back, in my stockinged feet. Is it raining?

SUSAN. No, it isn't, but I never thought it would come to this between you and me. I never thought of you planning to shame me in the eyes of the neighbours.

TOM. Are you putting those boots away?

SUSAN. Very well, Tom.

[She takes them out, and returns at once.]

TOM. Right, so long as it's understood I'm in earnest. Now, listen, Susan. I'm not shaming you. Far from it! I've walked out from the works for a principle, but I've got views on principles. It's a belief of mine that a man's principle ought not to hurt his wife, and I'm living a strange life myself, a bit like prison—only you're here, so it isn't like prison—but I've told you to alter nothing in your way of life. I've got money in bank, and long enough before that money's spent I'll have young Walter begging me to go back on my terms. I'm living quiet myself, and eating quiet, and that's insurance. It's the extra safety margin in case young Walter's got more obstinacy than I think he has. But it's my insurance, Susan, and you carry on as usual. As usual, and no one can say I'm letting my principles do damage to my wife.

SUSAN. Well . . . I hope you're not too sure of yourself. *[She takes off her overall.]*

TOM. Meaning between me and Walter?

SUSAN. Yes.

TOM. That's all right. And now—

[Suddenly picks her up as she hangs overall behind door and kisses her.]

SUSAN. Well!

TOM. Just to show you, with a kiss thrown in for a flourish. Just to show you I've not gone soft yet with lack of exercise.

SUSAN *[fondly]*. You great gawp! *[Then she can see out of window, and—]* Put me down, Tom!

TOM. You're all right where you are.

SUSAN. Put me down, you fool! There's some one coming up garden path, and you know folks can see in here from garden.

[*But he carries her from the caller's possible view.*]

TOM. That's a complaint I have about women. They can't concentrate. Even when a woman's being kissed she's not single-minded about it. There's a bit of her mind wondering if her back hair's straight.

[*A ring is heard, and he puts her down.*]

SUSAN [*hands to her hair*]. You've ruffled mine all right.

TOM. It'll do for going to door and telling a fellow we don't want any writing-pads to-day. [Exit SUSAN.]

[*TOM picks up book and sits to read. SUSAN returns, showing in CHADWICK, a well-dressed businessman of fifty.*]

SUSAN [*evidently impressed*]. Tom, it's Mr Chadwick.

TOM. Mr Chadwick? Who's he? [Sees CHADWICK, rises.] Oh!

CHADWICK. How are you, Mr Murgatroyd?

TOM. Fine, thanks. [*They shake, then TOM with a gesture*] Of course! Of course! I couldn't think for moment what brought you in these parts. [*Informing SUSAN*] It's the cricket-match. Mr Chadwick's works team and our lot.

CHADWICK. Aren't you playing yourself?

TOM. Sit down. Me playing? No, I'm not playing to-day.

CHADWICK. That's a bit of luck for us. That spin bowling of yours——

TOM. Ach! I'm getting old.

CHADWICK. Old?

TOM. I'm thirty-six.

CHADWICK. Why, man, Jack Hobbs——

TOM. I know, I know. Only, in the first place, Hobbs is a marvel, and, in second place, he doesn't spend his time in a dye-house when he's not playing cricket.

That's one thing I've got on Jack Hobbs. I've not lost my amateur status.

CHADWICK [*offers cigarette-case*]. Smoke ?

TOM. No, thanks. She will.

CHADWICK [*rises, gallantly*]. Allow me, Mrs Murgatroyd. [*As he holds lighter for her*] I'm sorry your husband's a bit out of sorts.

TOM. Who says ?

CHADWICK. Off smoking and off cricket.

[*Glances at TOM's feet.*]

TOM. Boots off, and all. That's me to-day. Sitting at home doing a bit of reading.

CHADWICK [*picks up book, looks at title*]. I see. Do you find he can tell you much ?

TOM. Well, considering he's a man that writes a book, he isn't quite a fool. I'll tell you. I've pretty near finished that book, and three times—three times, mind you—he's got me proper wondering if he was right or I was. And one time out of them three I give him best. He beat me.

CHADWICK. Only once, though.

TOM. Oh, well, Mr Chadwick, you don't expect a fellow that writes a book on the theory of dyeing to know the job same as a practical man like me. But it just shows you—she's been objecting to my reading—it shows you you can pick up summat useful out of a book.

CHADWICK. That's so. Once in a way. Well [*glancing at SUSAN*], the fact is, seeing I was over anyhow with the team—

SUSAN. They'll be missing you.

CHADWICK. What ? Oh, they're happy. Getting lunch at the Red Lion.

SUSAN [*rising*]. You'll be wanting lunch yourself, Mr Chadwick.

CHADWICK. Is anything the matter ?

SUSAN. I'm good at guessing.

TOM. So'm I. What about the pictures you were going to ?

SUSAN. Mrs Butterworth's calling for me.

TOM. You didn't mention that before.

SUSAN. No.

TOM. I forget if you're a married man, Mr Chadwick.

CHADWICK. Oh, yes.

TOM. Oh, well. [*Their eyes meet in sympathy.*] Well, can you tell me how to budge a woman who doesn't want to budge? I've got no dynamite.

CHADWICK [*smiling*]. It's perfectly true I did come to discuss a bit of business with you.

SUSAN. And that's no news.

TOM. Pipe down, Susan! Give the man a chance. Now, Mr Chadwick, I'm listening. It may go in at one ear and out at t'other, but I'm listening.

CHADWICK. Not very encouraging.

TOM. Go on. It's your move. [CHADWICK *hesitates.*] Oh, I'll cut it short for you. I reckon the whole country knows I've had trouble with Walter Farnworth. A man like me walks out, and it's news. All right. Now you go on from there.

SUSAN. I don't like Staithley Bridge.

TOM. Susan, Mr Chadwick's works are at Staithley Bridge, and if I decide to go to his works you'll like Staithley Bridge. Not that he's asked me yet.

CHADWICK. Mrs Murgatroyd, would double his present wages do anything to overcoming your objections to Staithley Bridge?

TOM. I'm not denying this, Mr Chadwick—that's a compliment.

CHADWICK. No. It's an offer.

TOM. That's ten pounds a week you're offering. Did you know that?

CHADWICK. I knew.

TOM. Ten pounds a week, and they say there's a slump on.

CHADWICK. It's men like you that beat the slump.

TOM. That's true. That's something our Walter's

missed seeing. He'll see it if I go—permanent. I'll be a loss to Walter.

SUSAN. That's vicious, Tom.

TOM. I've not gone yet.

CHADWICK. Oh, but—

TOM. I'm considering your offer, Mr Chadwick. It has a lot of points in its favour. It has ten pound-notes a week in its favour. But wait a bit. I've not seen inside your works.

CHADWICK [*smiling*]. Are you going to talk about machinery?

TOM [*quietly*]. Machines! Machines! . . . Machines are like men [*glancing at SUSAN*] and woman: they're all right till they get uppish. But there's one trade, Mr Chadwick, where the fewer machines the better: dyeing yarn. I'm a yarn-dyer, and a good 'un—and machines—pah! Get a vat and put the right stuff in it, and hang your yarn over dye-poles, same as they did in ancient Egypt. That's how good yarn-dyeing's done to-day, same as it was then, and if you've let the machinists tell you different, and if you've listened to a machinist's salesman telling you the tale, and if you've put in labour-saving machinery that doesn't save because it doesn't do good work, then I tell you—

CHADWICK. Yes, I did put machinery in.

TOM. Then to hell with you!

CHADWICK. I put it in, then scrapped it.

TOM. Oh! You put it in, then scrapped it? Then, am I right? Is there anything to bear the old way with yarn . . . with a few modern improvements and . . . and a man like me to watch the mixings and the temperatures?

CHADWICK. I'm sure you're right.

TOM. I could tell our Walter something now.

CHADWICK [*sharply*]. Could you?

TOM. I could so. I could tell him something about the machines he's aiming to put in. I could tell him they bit you.

CHADWICK. Quite possibly different machines.

TOM. Same—alleged object.

CHADWICK. Don't you see, Murgatroyd, you can't tell him ?

TOM. Why ?

CHADWICK. You can't give him information you've got in private conversation with me. It would be breach of confidence.

TOM. I don't recollect you cautioned me about it.

SUSAN. He'd no need to, Tom, and you know it. That's quite understood, Mr Chadwick. You've been speaking confidential.

CHADWICK. Thank you, Mrs Murgatroyd.

TOM. That's right. That's quite right, but it's an awkward hole to be in. When Walter told me he meant to order those machines I first reasoned with him, and when reason fell on barren ground I put my coat on and walked out. And now I've proof positive from your experience that I'm right about it, and I've got to hold my tongue and maybe watch Walter spending money buying costly plant that I know and you know isn't worth the metal it's made of. Suits you fine, Mr Chadwick. Suits you to have nobody stop him making a fool of himself, same as you made a fool of yourself. But I quite see your point. I agree with it. My tongue's tied.

CHADWICK. Isn't this the point: that you're not any longer one of Farnworth's men and that therefore—

TOM. Aye, I'm at large. I admit that I don't need to feel I'm Walter's watch-dog.

CHADWICK. Especially as I . . . I made an offer.

TOM. You did, Mr Chadwick, and it's got me worried.

CHADWICK. Worried ?

TOM. Not about the figure. That's satisfactory. No ! I'm worried about myself.

SUSAN. Not about me ?

TOM. I can't think why I don't say "Yes." I can't think what's stopping me.

[SUSAN puts her hand on his shoulder.

No, lass, it's not you. Oh, I know, you're thinking of the chapel you're used to, and the shops you're used to, and yon fellow in the Co-op. groceries you'd have married if you hadn't married me, and you go in there and smile, and he gives you the best cut of bacon, you keeping your mouth shut about me being the bacon-fancier in this house, and not you—when I'm eating normal, that is. Yes, there's advantages in staying put: also there's something called progress, and ten pounds a week for [looks at CHADWICK] a starting wage is raising you and me into the motor-car class.

SUSAN. I hadn't thought of that.

TOM. Second-hand to start with, but you never know where folk will finish once they've gotten their feet loose from their native clay.

SUSAN. We'll come, Mr Chadwick.

[About to shake hands with CHADWICK.]

TOM [catching her wrist]. Who's making this decision, you or me?

CHADWICK. It's obviously "yes."

TOM. I know it's obviously "yes." [Then, with exasperated gesture] Then, why can't I say "Yes"? Why can't I? I'd have called me better than most at knowing my own mind, and I want to say "Yes," and can't. What's holding me back, Susan? What is it?

[SUSAN runs out, and before the men have time to speak is back with TOM's boots.]

SUSAN [eagerly]. Put them on.

TOM. What's the idea?

SUSAN. You can't think hard like that.

[Indicates his feet.]

TOM. I take you. A man's got to feel he's on parade to make a big decision. [Sits with boots; then] But if I put these on I'm declaring the siege is raised.

SUSAN. It is raised.

TOM [rises, moves from boots]. I can see now. I was hasty to throw that motor-car into the argument. I may sound backward to you, Mr Chadwick, sound

as though I'd less enterprise than a woman. It isn't that, only I'm studying deeper. *[Bell rings.]*

SUSAN *[annoyed]*. Oh, that'll be Mrs Butterworth.

TOM. She's one you'll miss if you go away from here.

SUSAN. Not me. I'll learn to drive that car, and it's not more than an hour's run from Staithley Bridge to Blackton. *[To door.]*

TOM *[catching her at door]*. Think on, Susan. You're going out with her.

SUSAN. Nay, I'm not. Not now.

TOM. You're going out. You cloud my judgment. I see you in a new hat and better clothes than I can buy now, and——

SUSAN. Tom!

TOM. No! No! It plays the hangment with my reasoning. You're going out, I tell you.

SUSAN. Well, if you've no objections I'll let Mrs Butterworth in while I'm putting my hat on. My old hat! *[Exit SUSAN.]*

CHADWICK. I don't know why you're hesitating, Murgatroyd.

TOM. Nor me, really. I'm sorry, Mr Chadwick. I'll be nearer my answer when I'm shut of my wife. A woman's a handicap to a man with a problem.

CHADWICK. Why is it a problem?

[SUSAN returns with MRS BUTTERWORTH.]

SUSAN *[as they come]*. I won't be a minute. I've got my things down here. Oh, this is Mr Chadwick. Mrs Butterworth. Sit down, Alice.

[CHADWICK bows. ALICE sits. SUSAN puts on outdoor clothes.]

TOM. How do?

ALICE. I'm well, thank you. Did you say Chadwick?

CHADWICK. That's my name.

ALICE. I know some Chadwicks. Are you related to Jeremiah Chadwick of Rochdale?

CHADWICK. I don't think so.

SUSAN. Alice, he's——

ALICE. Oh, you needn't be superior about Jeremiah Chadwick! He's a well-known man in Rochdale. An undertaker. Yes, they say in the family he was baptized to be an undertaker. Lamentations, you know. Has it ever struck you, Mr Murgatroyd, how common Bible names are in Lancashire? You've a Bible name yourself, but I think it's only in New Testament. Thomas. Doubting Thomas, as they called him.

TOM. Doubting! Doubting!

[CHADWICK turns to hide smile.]
Then I've a misfit name. I look before I leap. That isn't doubting. It's deciding. [Turns his back, goes up to window, and looks out; draws back at once.] Susan, I'll thank you to open door to Mr Walter. And take Mrs Butterworth with you.

SUSAN. Mr Walter!

TOM [to CHADWICK]. Coming up path.

CHADWICK [suspiciously]. What does he want here?

TOM. He'll tell us that.

[Bell rings. SUSAN gestures ALICE to come to door.]

ALICE [rising]. Well, I'm pleased to have met you, Mr Chadwick. You've got important namesakes in Rochdale. [Holds out her hand.]

CHADWICK [shakes it with slight reluctance]. Good day, Mrs Butterworth.

SUSAN [impatiently]. Come along, Alice.

ALICE. I'm coming.

[Exeunt ALICE and SUSAN; door left open.]

CHADWICK [briskly]. Now, listen here, Murgatroyd. You've to think quickly for once, and——

TOM [checking him]. He might listen, and all. That door's open.

SUSAN [off]. Yes, he's in, Mr Farnworth. You'll find him in there.

[She comes to door. WALTER enters. Exit SUSAN, closing the door. WALTER is twenty-six, and in cricket flannels and blazer.]

WALTER [taken by surprise on seeing CHADWICK].
Hullo! You here!

TOM. Of you two gentlemen it's more remarkable that you're here. I recollect we didn't part so friendly.

WALTER [*glances at TOM, then goes to CHADWICK*]. How are you?

CHADWICK [*shakes hands*]. I'm all right. [*Looks at watch.*] Is it so late? [*It isn't.*] You've got your war-paint on early.

WALTER. I may have a bit of travelling to do before the match. [*Looks at TOM.*] But I hope not.

TOM. Referring to me?

WALTER. Possibly you've not heard of our troubles.

TOM. So what they are, they're your troubles, Mr Walter.

WALTER [*tersely*]. I see. I thought it might still interest you to know why Mr Chadwick's team is almost certain to win, but as it doesn't— [*To door.*]

TOM. Hold on. Let's get this straight. Are you here about cricket?

WALTER. Yes.

TOM. Oh! No, no, it doesn't interest me.

[*WALTER opens door, and TOM goes to him.*]
Why's Mr Chadwick's lot going to win? We beat them on their own ground.

WALTER [*closing door*]. We had a good fast bowler and [*indicates TOM*] a good slow bowler.

TOM. You've still got a good fast bowler. Got Aleck Warburton, haven't you?

WALTER. No. He's playing for Blackton to-day in the League match.

TOM [*disgustedly*]. I call the man a traitor. League or no league, he's no right to desert us to-day. It's always a needle match when we meet Chadwick's, and Aleck knows that as well as I do. Oh, but—

[*Looks blank, remembering the match is no affair of his.*]

WALTER [*quickly*]. That isn't all. Wilfred Turner sprained his ankle practising last night. I'm playing young Blakeley for him.

TOM. He'd be a good bowler if he were ever on the

wicket. I'm bound to agree with you, Mr Walter. It's fair giving Chadwick's the match.

WALTER. Unless you'll play, Tom.

TOM. Me ?

CHADWICK. Weren't you saying you're too old ?

TOM. I passed the remark. I wasn't too old last June to take five wickets of your lot for thirty-two.

CHADWICK. Of course, strictly, you're not eligible to play for Farnworth's to-day.

WALTER. That might be——

TOM. No. That's right. [*Sits, miserably.*] That's right. Play for a team for ten years, and when they're in a hole you aren't allowed to assist them. It's things like that make life what it is.

CHADWICK [*touches his shoulder*]. Oh, I'm not making a point of it.

TOM. You're not ? [*Rises and shakes hands.*] Thank you, Mr Chadwick. That's the right note. I call that sporting, not objecting to a strong opponent though you've grounds for it. It puts you high up in my estimation. I wish I could take the opportunity.

WALTER. But you can. Mr Chadwick says——

TOM. He says like a gentleman. Only it isn't what he says ; it's what I feel. You'd better be getting after some one else, Mr Walter. How can I do it, Mr Chadwick ? [*Almost appealing*] How can I ? It'd be a sign that I belonged to Farnworth's. It'd look like I'd forgiven him.

[CHADWICK again has a smile to hide.

WALTER. Forgiven ?

TOM. Aye. Me playing cricket under a skipper that's no better sense than to think machines can dye yarn. They can't dye yarn. They don't save labour, and I'm against labour-saving if they did. And if I join your team to-day it's as good as saying I've been converted to your views, when the whole town knows I've been standing out against your views.

[*Casually, WALTER takes an end of green yarn out of his pocket.*

What's that ?

WALTER. Have a look at it.

TOM [*takes a look*]. What's wrong with it ? [*Looks at WALTER.*] If you tell me that's been dyed by machinery I'll have to take back every word I've said.

WALTER. There's no new machinery in the place yet, Tom. It's only a fortnight since I first mentioned it to you.

TOM [*holding the yarn up*]. Well ?

WALTER. You dyed it.

TOM. Oh, I dyed it ? I seen it were good work.

WALTER. Yes. Now look at this. [*From his other pocket produces another end of green yarn, which is perceptibly duller than the first.*] That's the best we can do against it. That's the best of four tries.

TOM. Green's a tricky shade. [*Examines it.*] Who've you got trying his hand at filling my shoes ?

WALTER. Young Blakeley.

TOM. I thought so. I've taught him a lot. But not quite everything. Well, I'll tell you one thing, Mr Walter. You can't deliver a shade like that. It'd ruin the reputation of the firm.

WALTER. What am I to do ?

CHADWICK. Er——

[*Comes and touches TOM's shoulder.*]

[*TOM pockets the yarn with the instinct of not letting a rival see.*]

TOM. Oh, aye. Yes, of course.

[*Glances self-consciously from CHADWICK to WALTER.*]

CHADWICK. You're not forgetting me.

TOM. I'm too grateful to forget.

WALTER. Grateful for what he said about the team.

TOM. There's more to it than that.

WALTER. I thought there would be when I found Mr Chadwick here.

[*Meets CHADWICK's eye.*]

CHADWICK. Well, you could think right without overheating your brains. And not a case of trying to steal your man, Farnworth. He isn't your man.

TOM. That's right enough. I'm disengaged at

moment. [*Takes the yarn out.*] Aye, and look at result. [*Repockets yarn.*]

CHADWICK [*not looking*]. The result is, I made you an offer. Your wife approved, I think.

TOM. My wife? Aye, that was a failure of mine, failing to get shut of my wife during a business talk. And then me letting slip summat about a motor-car to a woman with ambitions. She'd take a lot of pleasure driving into Blackton in the early morning, her sitting in the car and watching the other women doing their front steps.

CHADWICK. There's nothing to stop her.

TOM. She'd take some stopping now. You saw yourself how that idea of a car turned her right round from hating Staithley Bridge to loving it. I'm just short of having said absolute 'yes' to him, Mr Walter, but that's how we stand.

WALTER. I see. Well, strong men before you have been ruled by their wives.

TOM. What? Me ruled by her!

WALTER. I'd just like you to know one little thing, Tom. I'm not putting that machinery in.

TOM [*deeply impressed; then quietly*]. That's a victory for common sense.

WALTER. It's a victory for you. You pulled me up, and I made further inquiries. I found it didn't do all that was claimed for it.

[CHADWICK *shows annoyance*.]

TOM. There's this about our Walter, Mr Chadwick—he's not above learning.

WALTER [*drily*]. Much obliged.

TOM. Well, so you ought to be obliged. Look at brass I've saved you! Aye, and look at the problem you've set me.

CHADWICK. The problem being—the problem!—whether Tom Murgatroyd wants to get on in life or to stay back with the comparatively small dye-works of Mr Farnworth.

TOM. I know that, Mr Chadwick, I know. But look

at the mess they've made of things since I went. And if I go permanent and Mr Walter gets another dyer in my place it isn't likely he'll be as good as me. You know it isn't, or you'd not be after me yourself.

CHADWICK. That's his trouble.

TOM. I can't see it that road.

CHADWICK. When a man makes a move his past is something he puts behind him.

TOM. Then I'm none moving. I couldn't live happy with the weight on my mind that Farnworth's were turning out bad work. I'm sorry, Mr Chadwick. I'm deeply obliged to you for your offer [*turns to WALTER*], but if you'll re-engage me now, this moment, Mr Walter, I'll put my flannels on and play for Farnworth's with my conscience clear.

WALTER. Right.

[*SUSAN bursts in.*]

SUSAN. It is not right.

TOM. I sent you to pictures.

SUSAN. Don't be daft! I've had my ear at keyhole.

TOM. Then I've a job for you. Go and get iron and put the straightest crease you can in my white trousers. When I go on field to-day I'll be observed above a bit on account of my late quarrel with Mr Walter, and I'll make a smart appearance. [*Hustling her*] Go on, now. There's no time to waste.

[*Pushes her out, closes door, and stands against it.*]

CHADWICK. A little forcible.

TOM. I did the needful. She'd overheard Mr Walter say I'm ruled by a woman.

CHADWICK [*accepting defeat*]. Well . . . [*To WALTER*] You going straight to the ground? My car's outside.

WALTER. Thanks. [*Looks at TOM.*] Yes, my team's complete. [*TOM opens door. Exeunt CHADWICK and WALTER.*]

TOM [*comes C., sees boots*]. Boots, eh? Cricket boots, I reckon. [*Calls.*] Have you finished Susan?

[*Takes coat off.*]

SUSAN [*off*]. Give me a chance.

[*TOM swings his bowling arm.*]

TOM [*doubtfully*]. Well, it'll be a test of oatmeal diet.

[*SUSAN enters with his trousers over her arm.*
Done them?

SUSAN. Not yet. [*Gently, hand on his arm*] Tom!

TOM. It's settled right way, lass. You'd never be happy if you knew I were miserable.

SUSAN. Why should you be?

TOM [*takes yarn out of his pocket*]. That's the answer. Cast your eyes on that. You heard outside door, but you didn't see. I've been too long at Farnworth's to be heedless about them. I can't let work like that go out of the place.

SUSAN [*comprehendingly*]. All right. [*She just touches him.*

TOM. [*takes waistcoat off*]. I'll slip upstairs and change my shirt. Think on those trousers are done by I come down. [*Up to door.*

SUSAN. You didn't—

[*She stops.*

TOM [*by door*]. Eh?

SUSAN. You didn't say anything to Mr Walter about a motor-car wage.

TOM. I didn't just then, but you wait a bit, Susan. I've learnt things about my value to-day that I didn't know before. [*Going out.*

SUSAN. You're always surprising me, Tom.

CURTAIN

HAROLD CHAPIN was born at Brooklyn in 1886, but as he was brought to England at the age of two his American citizenship was merely technical. In thought and temperament he was characteristically English, and his best plays, like "It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor" and "The Dumb and the Blind" (included in the second and third volumes of this series), are almost perfect specimens of low-life Cockney drama.

Chapin was essentially a man of the theatre. His experience as an actor and subsequently as a producer doubtless helped him in his work as dramatist. In his short life he wrote sixteen plays, including "The New Morality" and "Art and Opportunity," but his genius expressed itself most naturally in the one-act form. He had an enviable gift for writing dialogue—the power to make words 'come alive' as they escaped from his pen; and he had an even rarer gift in his power to create character.

Chapin was doing excellent work for the theatre when the first War broke out. He enlisted immediately, and was killed at the battle of Loos in 1915.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

BY HAROLD CHAPIN

CHARACTERS

A NIGHT WATCHMAN, a solid, gruff-voiced old man of seventy. Wears corduroys, a heavy great-coat, and a large old bowler hat. His beard and eyebrows are shaggy, but his upper lip is more or less clean-shaven. He speaks slowly and with dense authority.

AUGUSTUS, a young man of twenty-seven. Typical Bowery 'Sport.' Dressed in striped jersey, light trousers, very tight-fitting, a light jacket and waistcoat, pointed-toed brown boots much the worse for wear, and a narrow-brimmed black bowler hat. He needs a shave, and though spry, looks very down on his luck.

A POLICEMAN, of the usual type, but suffers from a bump of facetiousness and a desire to be funny.

TIME AND PLACE: The corner of a London square early on a winter's morning.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER¹

The NIGHT WATCHMAN is discovered sitting forward in his shanty, smoking a short pipe. As curtain rises the POLICEMAN paces slowly across back from R. to L., and then down pavement L. He pauses and looks at shanty, then comes to trestle down L. and leans on it and hails the NIGHT WATCHMAN facetiously.

POLICEMAN. Hullo, you're not dead, then ?

WATCHMAN [*looking up*]. Good Gawd, no ! 'Oo's been saying I was ?

POLICEMAN. No one. I——

WATCHMAN. Do I look ill ? I feels all right.

POLICEMAN. It was just my——

WATCHMAN. P'raps I was over-sound off.

POLICEMAN. It was only my fun.

WATCHMAN [*wondering*]. What was ?

POLICEMAN. Oh, about you're being dead.

WATCHMAN. But I ain't.

POLICEMAN. No. [*Bitterly*] I know you ain't. I never thought you was. You can't see the joke. I was trying to be *funny*, see ?

WATCHMAN. *Funny* ? I don't see much fun in that.

POLICEMAN [*retreating*]. Oh, good night.

WATCHMAN. Blimme, what's up with you ? Stop and 'ave a warm.

POLICEMAN. Thanks ; don't mind if I do.

WATCHMAN. Then why don't you ?

POLICEMAN. I give it up.

[Enters enclosure by stepping over low end of pole. He leans against shanty, which sways.]

¹Published separately by Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd, at 1s. net. Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

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WATCHMAN. 'Ere steady on! Do you want to 'ave me over?

POLICEMAN [*with a return of facetiousness*]. Not to-night, thank you.

WATCHMAN [*quite seriously*]. I shan't be here to-morrow.

POLICEMAN [*after warming hands for a moment in silence*]. Cold.

WATCHMAN. Who?

POLICEMAN [*nonplussed*]. We—the weather. . . .

WATCHMAN. You speak for yourself. I ain't.

POLICEMAN [*humorously once more*]. Not a crime to feel the cold, is it? [*Pauses for a reply.*] I say I shan't be dismissed the Force for mentioning it, shall I? [*Pauses again; still no reply from the WATCHMAN.*] Oh. Lor! [*Changing the subject*] Rather an uncomfortable sort of place to spend the night, this.

WATCHMAN. I've seen worse.

POLICEMAN [*engagingly*]. I'm sure.

WATCHMAN. 'Ow about 'Ampstead, right facing the 'Eath? Or the middle of Waterloo Bridge, with it raining cats and dogs.

[*The POLICEMAN starts to make a humorous remark, but thinks better of it. The WATCHMAN regards him severely.*]

WATCHMAN. What say?

POLICEMAN. I was only going to say, "Yes, yes."

WATCHMAN. Oh! [*Resuming*] Well, 'ow about them places, eh? Or the top o' the Highgate Harchway? Or 'Obing Viaduck, where the road-cleaners drench you down every morning reg'ler. Or . . . well, or some place like that? Why, this is a nice sheltered locality 'longside them.

POLICEMAN [*convinced*]. Yes, I can see it must be.

WATCHMAN. Then what did you want to talk such nonsense for?

POLICEMAN. You know you're very hard to get on with, you are, really. 'Ere I try to be agreable and chatty in return for a warm, and you snaps me up. I'm

'urt. You can't 'elp 'aving no sense of 'umour, poor chap, but when a . . . a guest at your fireside tries to be pleasant and agreeable you've no business to go snappin' of 'im up like this. [WATCHMAN *laughs gruffly*.

POLICEMAN. Oh, you see the joke of *that*, do you? Perverted old individual! [WATCHMAN *snores softly*.

POLICEMAN. Eh? [Snore repeated.

POLICEMAN. 'Ere, I say, you're a nice sort of watchman, I don't think. I'll make a note of that. "Watchman on drainage job asleep."

WATCHMAN [*quite calmly, without opening his eyes*]. I shall reply that the policeman on duty mesmerized me with 'is funny little way.

POLICEMAN [*hastily stepping over low pole R.*]. Well, think I'll be saying good night.

WATCHMAN. Good night.

POLICEMAN [*by exit down R.*]. Good night, old Stick-in-the-mud.

WATCHMAN [*coming out of his shelter angrily*]. Look 'ere! Don't you go calling me out of me name!

[POLICEMAN *exits down R.*

Tryin' to be funny. 'E ought to be on the 'alls. I wonder they 'ave 'im in the Force.

[*Busies himself with fire.*

[*Enter AUGUSTUS up R. He is whistling dolefully, but walking fairly briskly to keep warm, hands deep in pockets. He comes down C., and stops as he reaches the front of the shelter. The WATCHMAN is just re-entering the shanty, and has his back full to AUGUSTUS.*

AUGUSTUS. Gee whiz! You look cozy! Can I have a warm up?

WATCHMAN [*glancing over his shoulder as he pats up sacking on seat inside shelter*]. Why shouldn't you?

AUGUSTUS. And yet, again, why should I? [*He steps over pole and stands R. of fire, warming his hands. The WATCHMAN is well out of his sight.*] Cold, ain't it?

WATCHMAN. I feel all right.

AUGUSTUS. Well, that's a blessing, anyway. I don't.

My, what a fire! I haven't felt warm for a month. The dive where I have been dossing is like a refrigerator.

WATCHMAN. Where's that?

AUGUSTUS. Over Edgware Road way—Bell Street, to be exact.

WATCHMAN. Why aren't you there now?

AUGUSTUS. Tariff too high for me. [*Shows pockets.*]
Stoney, boss, stoney.

WATCHMAN. Drink or gambling?

AUGUSTUS. How rude you are! Nothing of the sort. Depression in trade.

WATCHMAN. Trade is bad. What do you expect with this Government? D'you smoke?

AUGUSTUS [*nodding*]. And chew.

WATCHMAN. Chewin's immoral and ungodly. It's a disgusting vice, that's what it is. Have a smoke?

[*Proffers pouch.*]

AUGUSTUS. Eh? Rather! You're a trump!

[*Takes pouch and rolls himself a cigarette, taking papers from jacket pocket.*]

WATCHMAN [*eyeing cigarette-papers unfavourably*]. Why don't you smoke a pipe, like a Christian?

AUGUSTUS. Haven't got a pipe. [*Lighting up*] Don't like pipes, anyway. Cigs. are more sporty. You're as bad as my old dad was. Where's the difference?

WATCHMAN [*laying down the law decidedly*]. Cigs. is vice. Pipes isn't.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, rats! [*Hands back pouch.*]

WATCHMAN [*taking pouch and observing AUGUSTUS's hand as he does so*]. Blimme, 'ow your 'and shakes! What's up with you?

AUGUSTUS. Guess I'm suffering from a bad attack of nante denarii, sometimes known as gotno spondulico, which is invariably attended with nante monjary and consequent shakes.

WATCHMAN [*greatly impressed*]. Where do you feel it?

AUGUSTUS. Sinking, 'ollow feeling inside, and a nasty light headache.

WATCHMAN. Do you mean to say you're 'ungry?

AUGUSTUS. I had some breakfast yesterday.

WATCHMAN. Why didn't you say so afore? [*Bends down and produces from under seat a paper containing bread and meat, which he passes to AUGUSTUS.*] D'ye want a knife?

[*Offers a clasp knife.*]

AUGUSTUS. 'Pon my Sam, you're a white man! [*Opens knife and starts eating.*] Bit tricky, eh? [*alluding to the difficulties of eating with a clasp knife*].

WATCHMAN. Ah, it takes some time to get used to it. [*Watches AUGUSTUS eating in silence for a moment.*] Let me know if the knife shuts up on your tongue, won't you?

AUGUSTUS [*in surprise*]. Eh?

WATCHMAN. It used to 'ave a narsty 'abit of shuttin' up like. I tightened the screw a bit the other day. One sometimes makes things a bit better by tinkering them about, and sometimes a lot worse.

AUGUSTUS. It works out all serene now.

WATCHMAN. I 'ayen't 'ad the opportunity of tryin' it—not liking to ruh any risks of cuttin' meself, you understand. I'm getting a bit old to try experiments. Now, a young chap such as you 'asn't no cause to bother about a cut lip—they 'eals up all right nine times out o' ten, whereas in anyone o' my age a pois'nous wound is a narsty matter.

AUGUSTUS. Very. [*Continues eating.*]

WATCHMAN [*after another pause*]. I suppose you know it's a bad thing to eat so fast—especially when you're 'ungry. You'll be gettin' 'eart-burn.

AUGUSTUS. I'll risk it. Upon by Sam, you are a brick, though! If I was the sentimental sort I'd say you was the first—the only one—to treat me decent since I've been back.

WATCHMAN. Back? Where from?

AUGUSTUS. States.

WATCHMAN. Meanin' America?

AUGUSTUS [*with mouth full*]. Um.

WATCHMAN. What part ?

[AUGUSTUS *appears not to hear.*

WATCHMAN. What part of America ?

AUGUSTUS. Top left-hand corner.

WATCHMAN [*severely*]. Don't be funny ! I asked you what part of America you was in.

AUGUSTUS [*hurrying through the information*]. New York mostly—out West, and in 'Frisco a bit, but N'York mostly.

WATCHMAN. What sort of place is it ?

AUGUSTUS. Al. Tip-top. Best ever.

WATCHMAN. 'Ere, no irreverence. What trade was you in ?

AUGUSTUS. Trade ! Now do I look like a tradesperson ? I was a pro-fessional.

WATCHMAN. Well, what perfession, then ?

AUGUSTUS. I'll give you three guesses.

WATCHMAN. I asked you ; I ain't a guesser.

AUGUSTUS. Persistency, thy name is——

WATCHMAN. I asked a civil question ; I expecks a——

AUGUSTUS. A civil answer. I've heard that before. I'll try. [*With exaggerated courtesy*] I was assistant deputy stamp-licker at the White House. Y'see, there's so much danger of the Tammany bosses poisoning Teddy that they have to find galoots with fine constitutions . . . like me . . . to——

WATCHMAN [*severely*]. You ain't telling the truth !

AUGUSTUS. Discovered ! Did you expect me to !

WATCHMAN [*stolidly*]. I did.

AUGUSTUS. Well, you are a lalapaloosa ! You deserve it for your faith. I respect an elderly yob. There's something touching about one. I was a sport, see ! [WATCHMAN *does not see.*] You know. Did a bit with the gloves. [*Spars at imaginary antagonist.* WATCHMAN *remains absolutely dense.*] Bunco-steerer. Never hear of a bunco-steerer ? A—a—oh, Lor', a 'sport.' You know what a 'sport' is, don't you ?

WATCHMAN. Fishin' ?

AUGUSTUS. Fishing? Crimy, no! A 'sport'! Oh poker, poker. You know——

[Deals imaginary pack of cards.]

WATCHMAN. Card-sharper?

AUGUSTUS. Only when necessary, but you're getting warmer. Sort of guide, philosopher, and friend to anyone who wanted to see life and spend money. I milled a bit too when I could find a backer.

WATCHMAN [after a pause]. I've got a son out there—doing well . . . not your sort at all . . . thank Gawd! Why don't you get work?

AUGUSTUS. Well, y'see, it's like this: I'm not the working sort. I'm a 'sport,' I am. Over in God's country I could always make good, but over here . . . when I tried to arrange a match in the back-room of a little pub—just a few friendly rounds you understand—the boss said the police would do for his licence. Rot! As if he couldn't have squared 'em! Then I started a poker-dive—tip-top, I can tell you—but no one came but the cops, and *they* didn't lose any money. You're no 'sports' here. The only swabs willing to lose money seem to be the foreign waiters, and you have to be a foreigner to get them. Talk about free trade!

WATCHMAN. Bettin's sinful. You're on the road to the pit.

AUGUSTUS. Pit be blowed! I haven't enough for the gallery.

WATCHMAN. You are laughing on the brink of 'ell flame what can't never be quenched, for his mercy endureth for ever. [*Very impressively*] Amen.

AUGUSTUS. Glad to hear you've done. I wonder you talk to me if I'm such a 'gnostic—let alone give me grub.

WATCHMAN. Talking can't 'urt me. I've 'ad worse nor you around my fire afore to-night.

AUGUSTUS. Have you now? [Returning knife.]

WATCHMAN. You 'eard of the Willesden Wehr-wolf? Well, 'e was took sittin' as it might be there. That was while I was working in the 'Arrow Road. It was a dark,

'ailstormy night, wi' a wind as went through you. 'E comes to my fire just as day was comin' on, and 'e says, "Can I 'ave a warm?" and I says, "W'y not?" 'E was soaking wet, and 'e fair steamed aside my fire. Steamed like a kettle 'e did, until a cop comes up, thinking I was on fire, and then they nabbed 'im. 'Orrible, savage-lookin' man 'e was! You could fancy 'im drinkin' 'ot blood. 'Ave a drop?

AUGUSTUS [*starts*]. What? [*Sees that the WATCHMAN is proffering can.*] Oh, not for a bit, thanks.

WATCHMAN. It was through me as the Tootin' murderers got 'ung. Ever 'eard o' them?

AUGUSTUS [*sarcastically*]. Old pals of mine.

WATCHMAN. And that young chap as shot 'isself in a 'ansom. Lord de Vees—

AUGUSTUS. Poor old De Vees! We was at Oxford together.

WATCHMAN. Well, 'e 'ad a warm at my fire, and give me 'alf a quid just before 'e done it. I've got it now.

AUGUSTUS. What, ain't you spent it?

WATCHMAN. Spend a half-quid as was given me by a lord as committed suicide! Don't be silly! I've got it in the glass case with my old father's watch and some shells and things—

AUGUSTUS. Shells and things?

WATCHMAN. Lord, yes! I like relics o' the great. You see, you ain't nothin' to what I've 'ad around my fire—not yet.

AUGUSTUS [*thoughtfully*]. Thanks. Sounds hopeful for the future. I don't mind 'aving a drink now. [*Takes can and drinks a mouthful—he spits it out again with a wry face.*] Here, what is it?

WATCHMAN. What is it? Why, tea!

AUGUSTUS. Stale tea, and cold too, on a night like this! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. It might have seriously upset me. I haven't tasted tea since—
[*pauses suddenly*] since Gawd knows when.

WATCHMAN. More used to beer, I suppose.

AUGUSTUS. Wrong, boss! Whisky is my mark. Rye for pref.

WATCHMAN. Strong drink is sinful.

AUGUSTUS. "Strong drink is sinful." "Bettin's sinful." Was there anything else you said? Yes, b'gosh: "Cigs. is vice!"

WATCHMAN. So they is.

AUGUSTUS. Granted, boss, granted. I haven't tasted tea . . . not since— And I hope I never may again. Leastways, not cold.

WATCHMAN. What did you come over 'ere for?

AUGUSTUS. Eh? Oh, one thing and another.

WATCHMAN. Nothin' in particular?

AUGUSTUS. No . . . Yes. [*Seriously and in a different tone*] To hunt up my father and mother.

WATCHMAN. 'Ave you found 'em!

AUGUSTUS. I don't know.

WATCHMAN. Don't know?

AUGUSTUS. No. I think I have . . . but I'm not sure. And I'm not sure whether 'e'll be pleased to see me.

WATCHMAN. Oh! 'Ad a tiff? You know where 'e is, then?

AUGUSTUS. Um-hum. I know where I can find him. But I'm not sure whether 'e'll be pleased when I go to him.

WATCHMAN. Course he will. 'E's one o' your sort, I suppose.

AUGUSTUS. Why?

WATCHMAN. Like father like son. That's gospel.

AUGUSTUS [*whimsically*]. Is it?

[*Changes his position restlessly.*]

WATCHMAN. Ain't you tired leanin' about? Fetch yourself that barrer.

AUGUSTUS. Thanks.

[*Steps over fire and places barrow to L. of hut, and sits in such a way that he is out of sight of the WATCHMAN, but well in the glow of the firelight.*]

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER 59

WATCHMAN. You're never warm enough there. Move around to the fire.

AUGUSTUS. I'm all right, thanks.

[*A pause : AUGUSTUS starts to speak.*]

WATCHMAN. What say?

AUGUSTUS. I was thinking about your boy that you said went out to the States? I wonder if by any chance I might have met him. What was his name?

WATCHMAN. Oh, you wouldn't never 'ave met 'im. 'E was honest.

AUGUSTUS. That's good. Still, you might tell me his name.

WATCHMAN. Augustus Herbert Alfred Moon.

AUGUSTUS [*nods quietly to himself*]. No, I never met him.

WATCHMAN. Of course not! Went out nine years ago—'e was eighteen then. Started as a plumber and gasfitter. Doing well by now.

AUGUSTUS. Oh?

WATCHMAN. What might you mean by "Oh?"

AUGUSTUS. How do you know he's doing well?

WATCHMAN. Sure to be.

AUGUSTUS. You haven't heard from him?

WATCHMAN. Not yet.

AUGUSTUS. Not yet? Nine years!

WATCHMAN. But then 'e was busy and 'ad 'is way to make. Shouldn't be surprised if he owned a big business by now.

AUGUSTUS. Let's hope so. But suppose he doesn't? Suppose he hasn't got on?

WATCHMAN. Can't suppose such a thing. 'E was honest.

AUGUSTUS. That does make a difference—in plumbing.

WATCHMAN. It makes all the difference. 'E was Band of 'Ope from a boy: 'e never knew the taste of strong drink; 'e never touched a card. Why, 'e was simply bound to get on.

AUGUSTUS. People don't always.

WATCHMAN. 'E 'as.

AUGUSTUS. How about——

[Checks himself confusedly.]

WATCHMAN. Eh? How about what?

AUGUSTUS. Was there a . . . a—— [Sees a way to ask the question.] I mean, did anyone hear from him?

WATCHMAN. Yes . . . once.

AUGUSTUS. Who?

WATCHMAN [gruffly]. Never you mind.

AUGUSTUS. Was it some one you didn't like?

WATCHMAN [with some heat]. 'E wrote to some girl 'e'd been walkin' out with: he wrote to her as soon as 'e got ashore. Silly, affectionate letter sayin' as 'e was 'omesick.

AUGUSTUS. P'raps he was.

WATCHMAN [indignantly]. 'Omesick, with 'is way to make! She said as 'e was engaged to 'er too. Nonsense! I told 'er as 'e'd forgot all about her.

AUGUSTUS. Um-hum. I suppose she's forgot all about him too long before this.

WATCHMAN. Not she. She still talks about 'im, I'm told.

AUGUSTUS. What! Ain't she married?

WATCHMAN. Girls don't marry so easy in England, my lad. Especially when they chuck away good chances, as she's done.

AUGUSTUS [very earnestly]. I say, I want to ask you something. Just for the sake of an argument, suppose your boy hasn't got on? Suppose he were to come back, hard up . . . down on his luck . . . altered from when you knew him? Suppose he'd even been in prison? . . .

WATCHMAN [angrily]. Are you talking about my Haugustus?

AUGUSTUS. Only for the sake of argument.

[POLICEMAN enters above square L. and crosses behind shanty, coming down slowly R. of enclosure during dialogue.]

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER 61

WATCHMAN. Well, don't. I tells you 'e was bound to get on.

AUGUSTUS. 'E might have been unlucky.

WATCHMAN. There's no such thing as luck.

AUGUSTUS. Oh, isn't there? How about an accident?

WATCHMAN. 'E'd 'ave written. 'Is not writing proves——

AUGUSTUS. But if he hadn't?

POLICEMAN [*who has been listening*]. Excuse me, my lad, but if you're trying to make old Stick-in-the-mud see a joke I shall have to call the ambulance for one of you.

WATCHMAN. 'Ullo, Comic Cuts. Tryin' to be funny again?

POLICEMAN. Oh, we are gettin' on! He knows I was tryin' to be funny.

WATCHMAN. This young man wasn't.

AUGUSTUS. No, but I was trying to make him see an argument. I ought to have known it was no good.

POLICEMAN. Why? Do you know old Stick-in-the-mud?

AUGUSTUS. No. How should I?

POLICEMAN. Why shouldn't you? He ain't likely to lead you astray.

WATCHMAN. Funny again.

POLICEMAN. Appreciated at last.

AUGUSTUS [*rising*]. Well, good night, boss, and thank you.

WATCHMAN. Sit still. You ain't in no 'urry.

AUGUSTUS. No, but——

POLICEMAN. If you want to go off as soon as I comes up I shall have to keep an eye on you as a suspicious character.

AUGUSTUS. What do you live on? Pins?

POLICEMAN. No. Why?

AUGUSTUS. You're so sharp.

POLICEMAN [*laughing*]. That's good. Now, I can always laugh at a joke at me own expense.

AUGUSTUS. I suppose you'll go and crack that to the cook.

POLICEMAN [*surprised*]. Cook? What cook?

AUGUSTUS. It's a joke, Mr Officer. Cook; policeman.

WATCHMAN. Bless you, 'e ain't the cook sort! 'E's married.

POLICEMAN. How do you know?

WATCHMAN. You look it. Anxious, hard-worked, get-the-breakfast look about you! Better-lookin' p'lice over in America, eh, me lad?

POLICEMAN [*to* AUGUSTUS]. Oh, so you're from America? What part?

AUGUSTUS. North-west Territory.

WATCHMAN. Why, you told me New York.

AUGUSTUS. I was out West most of the time.

POLICEMAN. Then why tell 'im New York?

AUGUSTUS. You're mighty sharp, aren't you? Because we'd been mentioning New York, and I said I'd been there. If you're so sharp you'll cut yourself.

POLICEMAN. Or somebody else, p'raps. What business might you have been in out there?

AUGUSTUS. I might have been President, but I wasn't.

POLICEMAN. What was you, then?

AUGUSTUS. Steward on board train.

WATCHMAN [*stolidly surprised*]. Why, you told me something about——

AUGUSTUS [*fiercely under his breath to* WATCHMAN]. Shut up, can't you?

WATCHMAN [*in a loud and very hoarse whisper*]. Oh, that's it, is it? Right. Once tip me the wink and I can be as silent as the grave . . . as silent——

[*Goes on whispering unintelligibly but loudly, and winking to* AUGUSTUS.

POLICEMAN [*startled*]. 'Ullo! What's up with old Stick-in-the-mud? Sounds as if 'e'd swallowed a phogograph.

WATCHMAN [*turning on the* POLICEMAN *and assuming a bullying tone*]. Never you mind what's the matter

with me. You're too inquisitive, see? You want to know too much, you do, see? See? [*To AUGUSTUS in a knowing whisper*] That's 'ow I talks to 'im.

POLICEMAN [*amazed*]. Now what's up? You are a rum, 'un, rounding on a chap like that. I was only askin' a few polite questions. [*To AUGUSTUS*] You don't mind a few friendly questions?

AUGUSTUS [*ill at ease*]. Oh, that's all right.

POLICEMAN. Righto. [*Holds out hand across pole.*

AUGUSTUS [*affecting not to notice hand*]. When you came up I was trying to make him see an argument.

WATCHMAN [*stolidly*]. You was trying to make me talk nonsense. My Haugustus, indeed!

AUGUSTUS [*hopelessly*]. Well, I think I'll say good night once more for the last time. You're a good sort. Bye-bye, officer.

POLICEMAN. Gently. I'm a bit interested in you.

AUGUSTUS. That's nice. [*Starts to move away.*

POLICEMAN. No, don't go. Please. You're rather like a gentleman I'm looking for. Suppose you come along o' me and have a nice warm and a nap at the station. [*Neither he nor AUGUSTUS moves a step.*] If you ain't 'im no harm's done, and if you do happen to be the gent, how much nicer to be took and done with, instead of walking about all night. What do you say?

AUGUSTUS. I say good night.

POLICEMAN. I thought so.

[*POLICEMAN stoops and runs under pole L. into enclosure as AUGUSTUS runs out of opening in front of fire and off down R. below square. The POLICEMAN follows closely, fumbling for his whistle.*

WATCHMAN. I 'ad an idea as— [*Comes out of enclosure and looks off below square. Whistle heard. WATCHMAN peers into distance. Whistle repeated farther off*] 'Ullo! 'E can't do it alone. [*Pause.*] I can't 'ardly see 'em. [*Pause.*] They're at the bend! [*Whistle very far off*] 'Ope to Gawd 'e won't be 'eard! [*Whistle a little nearer.*] 'Ullo! W'y they're— [*Goes to upper*

entrance and looks off.] Yes, they are. [*Whistle considerably closer.*] 'Ere we go round the—[*Comes down and re-enters enclosure.*] I like to be out of the way. [*Re-enters hut.*]

[*Whistle very close to R. upper entrance. Re-enter AUGUSTUS above square R., running and out of breath. He makes for exit down L., but as he reaches C. trips against low end of pole and falls. The POLICEMAN runs on R. above square and pounces on him before he can rise, pulling him to his feet by the coat-collar. They are in front of enclosure and R. of it.*]

AUGUSTUS [*panting*]. All right. You've nailed me. I'll go quiet.

POLICEMAN. Go quiet? You'd better! Let's have a look at you.

[*Holding AUGUSTUS by collar and wrist, starts him towards fire.*]

AUGUSTUS [*resisting*]. I'll go quiet. Don't—

POLICEMAN. Come over to the fire.

AUGUSTUS [*struggling fiercely*]. You don't know my face. You'll be sorry if—

POLICEMAN. Why, ain't you pretty?

AUGUSTUS [*angrily*]. You'll come to grief over that funny little way of yours. I'm your man right enough.

POLICEMAN. I want old Stick-in-the-mud to have a look at you.

AUGUSTUS. No! No! [*Struggles fiercely.*]

POLICEMAN. Yes, ducky, yes.

AUGUSTUS. I warn you if you take me in sight of him— You can look at me all you like at the station.

POLICEMAN. Let's look at you now.

AUGUSTUS. I've warned you.

POLICEMAN [*getting him a step*]. You have, and thank you.

AUGUSTUS. I told you if—

[*Breaks off suddenly and ceases to resist.*]

AUGUSTUS. All right. I'll—

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER 65

[*They reach the edge of the firelight. AUGUSTUS suddenly bends down and, embracing POLICEMAN'S knees, heaves him over his hip against pole, which falls with him. AUGUSTUS, released, rushes off down R. as before.*

POLICEMAN [*scrambling to his feet*]. He can't get round. I'll——

[*Runs off above square, blowing whistle. AUGUSTUS immediately re-enters over railings.*

AUGUSTUS. He'll have a nice little scamper. [*Goes up stage and looks cautiously after POLICEMAN. Whistle heard. He crosses behind shanty to exit down L.*] Good night, boss !

WATCHMAN. Good night, me lad ! Good luck !

AUGUSTUS [*pause*]. Good luck ?

WATCHMAN. Hadn't you better——

AUGUSTUS. Half a mo'. Your boy——

WATCHMAN [*impatiently*]. Good Lord !

AUGUSTUS [*almost pleadingly*]. Is . . . is your wife as sure he's got on ? Wouldn't his mother be pleased——

WATCHMAN. She's dead.

AUGUSTUS. Dead. I thought mothers waited till their boys came back. Oh, well, good night.

WATCHMAN. Good night. Be off ! Good luck !

AUGUSTUS [*under his voice*]. Dad.

[*Runs off down L. A whistle heard in the distance R. The WATCHMAN chuckles gruffly to himself.*

CURTAIN

THE names of Lady Gregory, Mr W. B. Yeats, and J. M. Synge will always be honoured as the pioneers of the Irish theatre, which began as a dream in 1898, and materialized in tangible form in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, about five years later. Lady Gregory was an enthusiast for Irish drama performed by Irish players. She was a prolific writer of folk-plays and folk-histories—the latter, exemplified by “The White Cockade” and “The Canavans,” reviving the vogue of the chronicle play in a realistic vein which is so popular to-day.

Lady Gregory was a keen student of Irish character, and her greatest works are peasant dramas, occasionally tragic (as in “The Gaol Gate”), but generally comedies, like “The Rising of the Moon,” “Spreading the News,” “Hyacinth Halvey,” and “The Workhouse Ward.” Her rich humour derives from the racy dialogue of the island and from fantastic ‘Irish’ situations, but fundamentally it is founded upon the whimsicalities of character, especially that of the Irish peasant.

A dictum of J. M. Synge may be applied with peculiar appropriateness to the plays of Lady Gregory: “On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy. Every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple.”

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

BY LADY GREGORY

CHARACTERS

MIKE MCINERNEY	}	<i>paupers</i>
MICHAEL MISKELL		
MRS DONOHUE, a countrywoman		

THE WORKHOUSE WARD¹

SCENE: *A ward in Cloon Workhouse. The two old men in their beds.*

MICHAEL MISKELL. Isn't it a hard case, Mike McInerney, myself and yourself to be left here in the bed, and it the feast-day of St Colman, and the rest of the ward attending on the Mass.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Is it sitting up by the hearth you are wishful to be, Michael Miskell, with cold in the shoulders and with speckled shins? Let you rise up so, and you well able to do it, not like myself that has pains the same as tin-tacks within in my inside.

MICHAEL MISKELL. If you have pains within in your inside there is no one can see it or know of it the way they can see my own knees that are swelled up with the rheumatism, and my hands that are twisted in ridges the same as an old cabbage-stalk. It is easy to be talking about soreness and about pains, and they maybe not to be in it at all.

MIKE MCINERNEY. To open me and to analyse me you would know what sort of a pain and a soreness I have in my heart and in my chest. But I'm not one like yourself to be cursing and praying and tormenting the time the nuns are at hand, thinking to get a bigger share than myself of the nourishment and of the milk.

MICHAEL MISKELL. That's the way you do be picking at me and faulting me. I had a share and a good share in my early time, and it's well you know that, and the both of us reared in Skehanagh.

MIKE MCINERNEY. You may say that, indeed, we are both of us reared in Skehanagh. Little wonder you to have good nourishment the time we were both rising, and you bringing away my rabbits out of the snare.

¹ Published separately by Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd, at 1s. net. Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

MICHAEL MISKELL. And you didn't bring away my own eels, I suppose, I was after spearing in the Turlough? Selling them to the nuns in the convent, you did, and letting on they to be your own. For you were always a cheater and a schemer, grabbing every earthly thing for your own profit.

MIKE MCINERNEY. And you were no grabber yourself, I suppose, till your land and all you had grabbed wore away from you!

MICHAEL MISKELL. If I lost it itself it was through the crosses I met with, and I going through the world. I never was a rambler and a card-player like yourself, Mike McInerney, that ran through all and lavished it unknown to your mother!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Lavished it, is it? And if I did, was it you yourself led me to lavish it or some other one? It is on my own floor I would be to-day and in the face of my family but for the misfortune I had to be put with a bad next-door neighbour that was yourself. What way did my means go from me, is it? Spending on fencing, spending on walls, making up gates, putting up doors, that would keep your hens and your ducks from coming in through starvation on my floor, and every four-footed beast you had from preying and trespassing on my oats and my mangolds and my little lock of hay!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Oh, to listen to you! And I striving to please you and to be kind to you, and to close my ears to the abuse you would be calling and letting out of your mouth. To trespass on your crops, is it? It's little temptation there was for my poor beasts to ask to cross the mering. My God Almighty! What had you but a little corner of a field?

MIKE MCINERNEY. And what do you say to my garden that your two pigs had destroyed on me the year of the big tree being knocked, and they making gaps in the wall.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, there does be a great deal of gaps knocked in a twelvemonth. Why wouldn't they

be knocked by the thunder, the same as the tree, or some storm that came up from the west ?

MIKE MCINERNEY. It was the west wind, I suppose, that devoured my green cabbage ? And that rooted up my champion potatoes ? And that ate the gooseberries themselves from off the bush ?

MICHAEL MISKELL. What are you saying ? The two quietest pigs ever I had, no way wicked and well ringed. They were not ten minutes in it. It would be hard for them to eat strawberries in that time, let alone gooseberries that's full of thorns.

MIKE MCINERNEY. They were not quiet but very ravenous pigs you had that time—as active as a fox, they were, killing my young ducks. Once they had blood tasted you couldn't stop them.

MICHAEL MISKELL. And what happened myself the fair day of Esserkelly, the time I was passing your door ? Two brazened dogs that rushed out and took a piece of me. I never was the better of it or of the start I got, but wasting from then till now !

MIKE MCINERNEY. Thinking you were a wild beast they did, that had made his escape out of the travelling show, with the red eyes of you and the ugly face of you, and the two crooked legs of you that wouldn't hardly stop a pig in a gap. Sure any dog that had any life in it at all would be roused and stirred seeing the like of you going the road !

MICHAEL MISKELL. I did well taking out a summons against you that time. It is a great wonder you not to have been bound over through your lifetime, but the laws of England is queer.

MIKE MCINERNEY. What ailed me that I did not summons yourself after you stealing away the clutch of eggs I had in the barrel, and I away in Ardrahan searching out a clocking hen.

MICHAEL MISKELL. To steal your eggs, is it ? Is that what you are saying now ? [*Holds up his hands.*] The Lord is in heaven, and Peter and the saints, and yourself that was in Ardrahan that day put a hand on them as

soon as myself ! Isn't it a bad story for me to be wearing out my days beside you the same as a spancelled goat. Chained I am and tethered I am to a man that is ransacking his mind for lies !

MIKE MCINERNEY. If it is a bad story for you, Michael Miskell, it is a worse story again for myself. A Miskell to be next and near me through the whole of the four quarters of the year. I never heard there to be any great name on the Miskells as there was on my own race and name.

MICHAEL MISKELL. You didn't, is it ? Well, you could hear it if you had but ears to hear it. Go across to Lisheen Crannagh and down to the sea, and to Newtown Lynch and the mills of Duras, and you'll find a Miskell, and as far as Dublin !

MIKE MCINERNEY. What signifies Crannagh and the mills of Duras ? Look at all my own generations that are buried at the Seven Churches. And how many generations of the Miskells are buried in it ? Answer me that !

MICHAEL MISKELL. I tell you but for the wheat that was to be sowed there would be more side-cars and more common cars at my father's funeral—God rest his soul !—than at any funeral ever left your own door. And, as to my mother, she was a Cuffe from Claregalway, and it's she had the purer blood !

MIKE MCINERNEY. And what do you say to the banshee ? Isn't she apt to have knowledge of the ancient race ? Was ever she heard to screech or to cry for the Miskells ? Or for the Cuffes from Claregalway ? She was not, but for the six families, the Hyneses, the Foxes, the Faheys, the Dooleys, the McInerneys. It is of the nature of the McInerneys she is, I am thinking, crying them the same as a king's children.

MICHAEL MISKELL. It is a pity the banshee not to be crying for yourself at this minute, and giving you a warning to quit your lies and your chat and your arguing and your contrary ways ; for there is no one under

the rising sun could stand you. I tell you, you are not behaving as in the presence of the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Is it wishful for my death you are? Let it come and meet me now and welcome, so long as it will part me from yourself! And I say, and I would kiss the Book on it, I to have one request only to be granted, and I leaving it in my will, it is what I would request—nine furrows of the field, nine ridges of the hills, nine waves of the ocean, to be put between your grave and my own grave the time we will be laid in the ground!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Amen to that! Nine ridges, is it? No, but let the whole ridge of the world separate us till the Day of Judgment! I would not be laid anear you at the Seven Churches, I to get Ireland without a divide!

MIKE MCINERNEY. And after that again! I'd sooner than ten pound in my hand I to know that my shadow and my ghost will not be knocking about with your shadow and your ghost, and the both of us waiting our time. I'd sooner be delayed in Purgatory! Now, have you anything to say?

MICHAEL MISKELL. I have everything to say, if I had but the time to say it!

MIKE MCINERNEY [*sitting up*]. Let me up out of this till I'll choke you!

MICHAEL MISKELL. You scolding pauper, you!

MIKE MCINERNEY [*shaking his fist at him*]. Wait a while!

MICHAEL MISKELL [*shaking his fist*]. Wait a while yourself!

[*MRS DONOHUE comes in with a parcel. She is a countrywoman, with a frilled cap and a shawl. She stands still a minute. The two old men lie down and compose themselves.*]

MRS DONOHUE. They bade me come up here by the stair. I never was in this place at all. I don't know am I right. Which, now, of the two of ye is Mike McInerney?

MIKE MCINERNEY. Who is it is calling me by my name ?

MRS DONOHOE. Sure am n't I your sister, Honor McInerney that was, that is now Honor Donohoe.

MIKE MCINERNEY. So you are, I believe. I didn't know you till you pushed anear me. It is time indeed for you to come see me, and I in this place five year or more. Thinking me to be no credit to you, I suppose, among that tribe of the Donohoes. I wonder they to give you leave to come ask am I living yet or dead ?

MRS DONOHOE. Ah, sure, I buried the whole string of them. Himself was the last to go. [*Wipes her eyes.*] The Lord be praised he got a fine natural death. Sure we must go through our crosses. And he got a lovely funeral ; it would delight you to hear the priest reading the Mass. My poor John Donohoe ! A nice clean man you couldn't but be fond of him. Very severe on the tobacco he was, but he wouldn't touch the drink.

MIKE MCINERNEY. And is it in Curranroe you are living yet ?

MRS DONOHOE. It is so. He left all to myself. But it is a lonesome thing the head of a house to have died !

MIKE MCINERNEY. I hope that he has left you a nice way of living ?

MRS DONOHOE. Fair enough, fair enough. A wide lovely house I have ; a few acres of grassland . . . the grass does be very sweet that grows among the stones. And as to the sea, there is something from it every day of the year, a handful of periwinkles to make kitchen, or cockles, maybe. There is many a thing in the sea is not decent, but cockles is fit to put before the Lord !

MIKE MCINERNEY. You have all that ! And you without e'er a man in the house ?

MRS DONOHOE. It is what I am thinking yourself might come and keep me company. It is no credit to me a brother of my own to be in this place at all.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I'll go with you ! Let me out of

this ! It is the name of the McInerneys will be rising on every side !

MRS DONOHOE. I don't know. I was ignorant of you being kept to the bed.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I am not kept to it, but maybe an odd time when there is a colic rises up within me. My stomach always gets better the time there is a change in the moon. I'd like well to draw anear you. My heavy blessing on you, Honor Donohoe, for the hand you have held out to me this day !

MRS DONOHOE. Sure you could be keeping the fire in, and stirring the pot with a bit of Indian meal for the hens, and milking the goat, and taking the tacklings off the donkey at the door ; and maybe putting out the cabbage plants in their time. For when the old man died the garden died.

MIKE MCINERNEY. I could, to be sure, and be cutting the potatoes for seed. What luck could there be in a place and a man not to be in it ? Is that now a suit of clothes you have brought with you ?

MRS DONOHOE. It is so, the way you will be tasty coming in among the neighbours at Curranroe.

MIKE MCINERNEY. My joy you are ! It is well you earned me ! Let me up out of this ! [*He sits up and spreads out the clothes and tries on coat.*] That, now, is a good frieze coat . . . and a hat in the fashion. . . .

[*He puts on hat.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*alarmed*]. And is it going out of this you are, Mike McInerney ?

MIKE MCINERNEY. Don't you hear I am going ? To Curranroe I am going. Going I am to a place where I will get every good thing !

MICHAEL MISKELL. And is it to leave me here after you, you will ?

MIKE MCINERNEY [*in a rising chant*]. Every good thing ! The goat and the kid are there, the sheep and the lamb are there, the cow does be running, and she coming to be milked ! Ploughing and seed-sowing, blossom at Christmas-time, the cuckoo speaking through

the dark days of the year ! Ah, what are you talking about ? Wheat high in hedges ; no talk about the rent ! Salmon in the rivers as plenty as turf ! Spending and getting and nothing scarce ! Sport and pleasure, and music on the strings ! Age will go from me, and I will be young again ! Geese and turkeys for the hundreds, and drink for the whole world !

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, Mike, is it truth you are saying, you to go from me and to leave me with rude people and with townspeople, and with people of every parish in the union, and they having no respect for me or no wish for me at all !

MIKE MCINERNEY. Whist, now, and I'll leave you . . . my pipe. [*Hands it over.*] And I'll engage it is Honor Donohoe won't refuse to be sending you a few ounces of tobacco an odd time, and neighbours coming to the fair in November or in the month of May.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, what signifies tobacco ? All that I am craving is the talk. There to be no one at all to say out to whatever thought might be rising in my innate mind ! To be lying here and no conversable person in it would be the abomination of misery !

MIKE MCINERNEY. Look now, Honor. . . . It is what I often heard said, two to be better than one. . . . Sure, if you had an old trouser was full of holes . . . or a skirt . . . wouldn't you put another in under it that might be as tattered as itself, and the two of them together would make some sort of a decent show ?

MRS DONOHOE. Ah, what are you saying ? There is no holes in that suit I brought you now, but as sound it is as the day I spun it for himself.

MIKE MCINERNEY. It is what I am thinking, Honor. . . . I do be weak an odd time . . . any load I would carry it preys upon my side . . . and this man does be weak an odd time with the swelling in his knees . . . but the two of us together, it's not likely it is at the one time we would fail. Bring the both of us with you, Honor, and the height of the castle of luck on you, and the both of us together will make one good hardy man !

MRS DONOHUE. I'd like my job! Is it queer in the head you are grown asking me to bring in a stranger off the road?

MICHAEL MISKELL. I am not, ma'am, but an old neighbour I am. If had forecasted this asking I would have asked it myself. Michael Miskell I am, that was in the next house to you in Skehanagh!

MRS DONOHUE. For pity's sake! Michael Miskell, is it? That's worse again. Yourself and Mike that never left fighting and scolding and attacking one another! Sparring at one another like two young pups, you were, and threatening one another after like two grown dogs!

MIKE MCINERNEY. All the quarrelling was ever in the place it was myself did it. Sure, the anger rises fast and goes away like the wind. Bring him out with myself, now, Honor Donohue, and God bless you!

MRS DONOHUE. Well, then, I will not bring him out, and I will not bring yourself out, and you not to learn better sense. Are you making yourself ready to come?

MIKE MCINERNEY. I am thinking, maybe . . . it is a mean thing for a man that is shivering into seventy years to go changing from place to place.

MRS DONOHUE. Well, take your luck or leave it. All I asked was to save you from the hurt and the harm of the year.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Bring the both of us with you or I will not stir out of this.

MRS DONOHUE. Give me back my fine suit so [*begins gathering up the clothes*], till I'll go look for a man of my own!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Let you go so, as you are so unnatural and so disobliging, and look for some man of your own, God help him! For I will not go with you at all!

MRS DONOHUE. It is too much time I lost with you, and dark night waiting to overtake me on the road. Let the two of you stop together, and the back of my hand to you. It is I will leave you there the same as God left the Jews!

[*She goes out. The old men lie down and are silent for a moment.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL. Maybe the house is not so wide as what she says.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Why wouldn't it be wide?

MICHAEL MISKELL. Ah, there does be a good deal of middling poor houses down by the sea.

MIKE MCINERNEY. What would you know about wide houses? Whatever sort of a house you had yourself, it was too wide for the provision you had into it.

MICHAEL MISKELL. Whatever provision I had in my house, it was wholesome provision and natural provision. Herself and her periwinkles! Periwinkles is a hungry sort of food.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Stop your impudence and your chat, or it will be the worse for you. I'd bear with my own father and mother as long as any man would, but if they'd vex me I would give them the length of a rope as soon as another!

MICHAEL MISKELL. I would never ask at all to go eating periwinkles.

MIKE MCINERNEY [*sitting up*]. Have you anyone to fight me?

MICHAEL MISKELL [*whimpering*]. I have not, only the Lord!

MIKE MCINERNEY. Let you leave putting insults on me so, and death picking at you!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Sure, I am saying nothing at all to displease you. It is why I wouldn't go eating periwinkles: I'm in dread I might swallow the pin.

MIKE MCINERNEY. Who in the world wide is asking you to eat them? You're as tricky as a fish in the full tide!

MICHAEL MISKELL. Tricky, is it! Oh, my curse and the curse of the four-and-twenty men upon you!

MIKE MCINERNEY. That the worm may chew you from skin to marrow-bone! [*Seizes his pillow.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*seizing his own pillow*]. I'll leave my death on you, you scheming vagabone!

MIKE MCINERNEY. By cripes, I'll pull out your pinfeathers !

[*Throwing pillow.*]

MICHAEL MISKELL [*throwing pillow*]. You tyrant ! You big bully, you !

MIKE MCINERNEY [*throwing pillow and seizing mug*]. Take this so, you stobbing ruffian, you !

[*They throw all within their reach at one another—mugs, prayer-books, pipes, etc.*]

CURTAIN

MR SAMPSON

By CHARLES LEE

CHARACTERS

CATHERINE STEVENS

CAROLINE STEVENS

MR SAMPSON

This delightful little comedy is a new variation on the eternal triangle theme. When two men fight to win a woman, or when two women compete for a man, the interest of the audience is generally biased in favour of one, even though the motives be queerly mixed. In "Mr Sampson" we find a bachelor in a dilemma because he is confronted with two equally attractive sisters, and therefore cannot make his choice. It reminds one of the famous 'free will' argument known as 'Buridan's Ass,' the said ass being placed at equal distances from two equally attractive bundles of hay. As the attraction was precisely equal the animal was unable to choose either, and therefore died of starvation.

Mr Sampson's final remark, "I ought to have been born a heathen Turk," suggests that bigamy might have solved the problem, but the suggestion need not be taken seriously. The humour of the play lies partly in the logical working out of a situation, partly in the unconscious humour of the characters. It needs to be acted with extreme simplicity and restraint.

The author has written a number of stories, but "Mr Sampson" was his first play, and was awarded the Lord Howard de Walden Cup at the British Drama League's Festival of Community Drama, when it was performed by the Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society several years ago. His only other play is entitled "The Banns of Marriage."

MR SAMPSON¹

The scene represents the kitchen of a West Country cottage. At the back of the stage, in the centre, is a latticed window, with geraniums in pots on the inner sill. To the right of the window (from the spectator's point of view) is a door communicating with the front garden; to the left a tall grandfather's clock; beyond that again a cupboard. On the right side of the stage a dresser, well garnished with crockery; a small pile of books on one of the shelves. Beyond the dresser another door. On the left side a kitchen range, in which a fire is burning. Beside a table in the middle of the room CAROLINE STEVENS, a gentle, timid, plump, soft-spoken woman of forty or so, sits darning a sock. As the curtain rises the clock strikes four. CAROLINE glances momentarily towards the clock and begins to talk to it, as people who are much alone are in the habit of talking to a cat or a canary. There are pauses when her work requires special attention; and now and again she repeats a phrase dreamily as her thoughts wander.

CAROLINE. Four o'clock, Grand'fer? Sister's late, an't she? She don't use to be so late market-day—you know that so well as I do. 'Tisn' often you put *she* to shame. . . . Wish I could say so much for myself. Four o'clock Saturday afternoon, and the baking not begun, and Mr Sampson's socks not finished mending—aw, scand'lous! I'm ashamed to look 'e in the face, Grand'fer, that I am—ashamed—to look e'—in the face. . . . What's keeping of her, I wonder? She haven' been so late from market not these fifteen year. And Mr Sampson coming in any minute now to pay his rent, and looking for a bit of a chat, and me never knowing for

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

the life of me what to say to 'm. Aisy enough talking to you, Grand'fer; but a rale, live man, that do ask questions and look to be answered back—that's different, and I haven' got used to him yet. . . . He's another of your reg'lar ones, Grand'fer—slow and sure, like it might be yourself. And I often think he favour you about the face—round and solemn-like. And he growl in his throat when he's going to say something, just like you before you strike up. . . . But you're an old friend, Grand'fer—oldest friend we got, and we'd never set eyes on he three months ago; so you needn't be jealous—no—Grand'fer needn' be jealous. [*With a sigh she gets up, goes to the fire, and tends it; then wanders to the window and looks out for a moment still talking.*] Yes if you'll mind, it's just three month come Tuesday since he come to live next door; and considering of it one way it might be three year, and considering of it another way 'tis more like three weeks. But that's the way with Time, Grand'fer, and always will be, for all your stiddy tick-tocking. Ayther 'tis crawling around like a worm, or else . . . or else 'tis walloping along like a butcher's cart. . . . Aw me! . . . [*By this time she is seated again.*] Sister's late, Grand'fer! Never knowed her to be so late before. If something should have happened!

[*She starts at the sound of a tap at the garden door. It opens, and MR SAMPSON appears on the threshold. He is an oldish man, stiff in his movements, very deliberate of speech; a fringe of grey whiskers encircles his round red face. A shy confusion comes over*
CAROLINE.

MR SAMPSON [*after profoundly clearing a throat unaccustomed to much vocal exercise*]. Arternoon, marm!

CAROLINE. Mr Sampson?

MR SAMPSON [*peering round*]. Sister in?

CAROLINE. No, Mr Sampson, not yet. I'm getting a bit anxious. She don't use to be later than four, and 'tis past that.

MR SAMPSON. Then you're all alone ?

CAROLINE [*acutely conscious of the fact*]. All alone. [*With an obvious effort*] Won't 'e step inside, Mr Sampson ?

MR SAMPSON [*after thinking it over*]. No, thank 'e. Can do very well where I be. Got a mossel o' bacca in my cheek, you see. More convaynient for spitting out here. [*He illustrates the convenience from behind a respectful hand.*] Thought I heard talking as I come up the path. Judged 'twas sister come home.

CAROLINE. Talking ? Aw, 'twas only me, chattering away to myself. Leastways [*with a bashful titter*], I was conversing a bit with Grandf'er here.

MR SAMPSON [*craning his neck into the room*]. Grandf'er ? Oh, ay, the clock ! Conversing with Grandf'er, eh ? [*With a short laugh*] Well, now, there's a sarcumstance for 'e !

CAROLINE [*nervously echoing his laugh*]. 'Tis foolishness, I allow. But I often chat a bit with Grandf'er when I'm alone. [*Gathering a little confidence*] He's capital company—'most like a Christian. Sister do often say he's as good as a man in the house. You see, Mr Sampson, 'tis he that do rule our comings and our goings, telling us to do this and do that all the while : now 'tis to get up and light the fire, and then 'tis to bustle and get dinner, and then, agin, 'tis to rake out the ashes and go to bed. Yes, Grandf'er's master here, I believe. So 'tis natural for two lonely females to look up to him and think a brave lot of him, when they haven' nobody else to be dependent on. And there ain't a stiddier clock, nor a handsomer, in all the country.

MR SAMPSON. A stately old chap, sure enough. [*A pause ; he shifts his feet ; she looks down and makes a few stitches.*] Those my socks ?

CAROLINE. Yes, Mr Sampson. They're 'most done [*Another pause.*] Hope you found the pasty to your satisfaction.

MR SAMPSON. Capital pasty, to be sure ! [*He*

advances a step into the room.] You take a lot of trouble about me, marm, you and your sister.

CAROLINE. No trouble at all, Mr Sampson. We couldn't do other, and you all alone next door with nobody to do for 'e, and no more notion how to do for yourself than a new-born baby.

MR SAMPSON. I'm a terrible poor hand at the cookery, that's sartain. [*He advances another step.*] Frying-pan, I don't say; but a man can't live by frying-pan alone. And as for darning a sock—well, I've tried. 'Twas like a fishing-net; the more I mended the more the holes came. Well, I recon I'm pretty and comfor'ble now. Never was so comfor'ble in my life.

CAROLINE [*earnestly*]. Glad to hear 'e say so. Anything we can do for 'e, you know, you've only to say the word.

MR SAMPSON. Thank 'e, marm; you're very kind. [*He makes a further advance, and assumes a confidential air. Her timidity immediately returns in a flood.*] There is something I wanted to say—something partic'lar I got to tell 'e—came in for the purpose. But, seeing as how it do consarn both of 'e, I reckon I'll wait till sister comes back.

[He makes deliberate preparations for settling himself in a chair.]

CAROLINE [*in an agony of nervous apprehension at the prospect of a tete-a-tete*]. Can't think what's keeping of her all this while. Never before have she been so late. Mr Sampson—

MR SAMPSON. Marm?

CAROLINE. Would 'e mind—if 'tishn' asking too much of 'e—would 'e mind going up the road a step or two, to see if you can catch a glimpse of her?

MR SAMPSON [*rising without alacrity*]. Sartainly, marm, if you do wish. No occasion for 'e to worry, though. She can take care of herself very well. Howsomever, if 'twill aise your mind I'll go so fur as the cross-roads and take a observation. [*Going*] Don't you fret; she'll turn up all right. [*He goes.*]

CAROLINE [*going to the window and watching him out of sight*]. He's walking awful stiff, Grandf'er. A shame to turn him out agin' just when he was settling himself down comfor'ble. But I couldn' do no otherwise. 'Tis all right when sister's here too; but to set down alone in a room with a man—no! I couldn't bring myself to it, even if 'twas a proper thing for a maiden to do. [*She turns away from the window and begins clearing the table, continuing meanwhile her colloquy with Grandf'er.*] Something partic'lar to tell us? I wonder, now—[*In some agitation*] Can't be going to give notice! Aw, nonsense! Don't be telling such foolishness, Grandf'er! He ain't one of your changeable ones: you know better'n that. "Never so comfor'ble in my life"—those were his words; you heard him yourself. . . . Wonder what 'a can be, though. [*A sudden amazing thought strikes her.*] Aw, if it should be—Aw, ridic'lous! He've never given no sign of *that* by word or look. Besides, if 'twas *that*, Grandf'er, don't 'e see he wouldn' wish to tell but one of us, whichever 'twas; and he said partic'lar 'twas *both* of us he wanted to say it to. . . . Aw, well, us'll know presently. [*She goes up to the clock.*] Aw, Grandf'er! Ten past four! Something's happened; I know it have! [*She sinks into a chair and begins to whimper.*] Aw, Cath'rine! Aw, deary dear! . . . [*She turns reproachfully on the clock.*] Tick-tock, tick-tock! You don't care! If 'twas Judgment Day you'd go on with your tick-tock till the fire caught 'e. If the truth was known you're nothing but a cage of wheels arter all, and no more heart to 'e than a Waterbury watch. [*Remorsefully*] There, I didn' mane to speak sharp to 'e; but you know how 'tis when things go wrong. [*Almost in tears*] You—you struck seventeen yourself when we moved 'e last spring-cleaning. . . . Ah! [*Hearing a sound outside, she runs to the window.*] 'Tis all right, Grandf'er; here she is at last, thanks be!

[*The door is flung open; CATHERINE comes in hurriedly and sinks exhausted on a chair.*]

She is older by several years than CAROLINE, and far more vivacious. Her movements are quick and abrupt, like a bird's and she gesticulates freely when speaking. On her arm is a basket containing the week's supply of provisions.

CAROLINE [*in an ecstasy of apprehension*]. Cath'rine, what is it? Aw, sister, what's the matter?

CATHERINE [*in a faint voice, panting heavily*]. Aw, my dear nerves! Aw, that I should live to see the day! [*She sets the basket down.*] Never shall we hold up our heads again! . . . Sister, we're disgraced for ever!

CAROLINE. Sister!

[*She drops into her chair and begins to weep.*

CATHERINE [*recovering her self-possession with an effort*]. Stop crying, Caroline, till I give 'e something to cry about! I can do that, I promise 'e. [*She begins her tale with a kind of melancholy gusto, and with immense volubility.*] I fancied whether something was up last week, when I see some of 'em putting their heads together and nodding and grinning upon me—Mrs Parkyn, the old venom, she was one, and Grace Budley was another, and when they two put their heads together they ben't concocting no testimonials, you may be sure. But I didn' take no notice; I'd scorn to take notice of the looks of such as they. Well, to-day I sold the chickens—chickens are down to one-and-nine, and lucky to get that—I sold the chickens, and I bought the flour and the sugar and the meat—nice bit of fat pork and six-penn'orth of gravy beef—and everything but the butter [*getting up and taking off her hat, etc.*]: butter's terrible scarce this week; gone up twopence, and everybody sold out, all but Mrs Parkyn—she's always the last to get rid of hers, and good reason why—well, I was bound to get some butter, if 'twas only her dirty old muck, so I went and bought a pound off her, and I won't say but what I might have sniffed to it a bit when I took it up; but she didn' say nothing, not till I'd paid her and she'd got the money safe in her

gown-pocket—trust her for seeing to that first—and then she said, "Very good butter, Miss Stevens," says she, daring of me, like, to say '*twasn*' very good butter, but I *wasn*' going to tell no lies to please the likes of she, you may be sure, so I said, "Us'll have to make it do, Mrs Parkyn, seeing there an't no better to be had," says I; so then she up and say, "You didn' use to be so partic'lar," says she. "Reckon your fancy man must have a terrible delicate stomick," says she.

CAROLINE [*in horrified bewilderment*]. Fancy man! Sister! Whoever—

CATHERINE [*grimly*]. Only one man just hereabouts that I know by.

CAROLINE [*gasping*]. Mr Sampson!

CATHERINE [*with stony self-possession*]. That's the chap: our fancy man—yourn and mine; and when she said the word you might have knocked me down with a feather—couldn' find a word to answer back, and I could feel myself going black-red all over. So Grace Budley—she was standing by waiting her chance, I don't doubt, the old cat—so she up and say, "Well may you blush, Cath'rine Stevens," says she. "If you'll take a friendly word from me," says she, "you'll hurry up, you and that half-baked sister of yourn and make the best of a poor job," says she, "and get your old Sampson to make a h-honest woman of one or the other of 'e so soon as may be," says she. [CAROLINE screams and buries her face in her apron. CATHERINE shows signs of breaking down, but controls herself and continues.] Shameful, so 'tis! We've always kept ourselves to ourselves, and never spoke a hard word nor a scand'lous word agin nobody. How can't they leave us alone? [*She goes to the fire and pokes it.*] Something's got to be done, and done to once too. [*After a moment's cogitation*] Where is he?

CAROLINE [*in broken phrases, muffled by her apron and shaken with spasms*]. 'A was here just now. . . . Got something partic'lar to say to us. . . . Wouldn' say it,

not till you come home. . . . Went out to look for 'e up the road.

CATHERINE. I came round by the path over the downs; that's what made me so late. I wasn' anxious to be meeting people by the road, as you may guess. [*She sits down.*] Hm! Got something partic'lar to say to us, have 'um? Well, p'raps we'll have something partic'lar to say to he!

CAROLINE [*dropping her apron*]. Sister! You'll never tell him! I'll die of shame if you tell him!

CATHERINE [*irresolutely*]. I don't know. Something's got to be done, if only I can think what. My poor old head—'tis all of a maze!

CAROLINE [*starting up*]. Sister! The gate! I heard the latch! Somebody's coming!

CATHERINE [*darting to the window*]. It's him! He shan't come in, though! Never agin shall he set foot in this house! [*She rushes to the door and bolts it.*] There!

[*With eyes fixed on the door, they await the event in breathless silence. The door is tapped gently. After an interval the latch is lifted and rattled. Another pause, and MR SAMPSON'S voice is heard.*]

MR SAMPSON. Anybody home?

CATHERINE [*going to the door and speaking through it*]. Grieved to say it, Mr Sampson, but you can't come in.

MR SAMPSON. How? What's up with 'e?

CATHERINE. I can't tell 'e, but you mustn't come in. Will 'e please to go away, Mr Sampson?

MR SAMPSON [*after a pause for consideration*]. No, I reckon. Not till I know what's the matter.

CATHERINE [*in despair*]. Aw, dear! I beg of 'e—go!

MR SAMPSON [*with slow emphasis*]. Not till I know what's up. If you'll open door you can tell me com-for'ble. I won't come in if you don't wish, but I'm bound to know what's up.

CATHERINE [*to CAROLINE, in a horrified whisper*]. He

won't go. What's to be done? [*CAROLINE shakes her head miserably.*] If I should tell him—[*CAROLINE throws up her hands in terror.*] He won't go if I don't tell him something. I'll wrap it up so well as I can. He'll be off quick enough when he knows what it is. He shan't look us in the face—I'll take care of that. [*Nerving herself to the desperate act, she withdraws the bolt, opens the door an inch or so, and sets her shoulder against it.*] Keep outside, if you please. We can't look 'e in the face. If we must tell 'e we must, but we can never look 'e in the face agin.

MR SAMPSON. So bad as that?

CATHERINE. Worse! Worse than anything you could think for! [*With a tremendous effort*] Mr Sampson, they're talking about us.

MR SAMPSON. Us?

CATHERINE. You and we. 'Tis all over the country—scand'lous talk. Aw, that I should live to see the day!

MR SAMPSON [*patiently*]. If you'll kindly give me the partic'lars, marm.

CATHERINE [*on the verge of tears*]. We never thought no harm. 'Twas only neighbourly to offer to do for 'e, and you all alone and so helpless. 'Tis a sin and a shame to say such things!

MR SAMPSON [*inexhaustibly patient*]. Say what things?

CATHERINE. Say—[*with a rush*—say that 'tis high time you took and married one of us!

[*In trembling expectation they await the result. It comes—first a long low whistle; then, to their amazement, an unmistakable chuckle.*

CATHERINE shrinks back from the door; it swings open, and MR SAMPSON is revealed, broadly smiling.

MR SAMPSON. That's a stale old yarn. Heard 'un weeks ago. Don't mind telling 'e, I mightn' have thought of it else.

CATHERINE [*bewildered*]. Thought of what?

MR SAMPSON [*placidly*]. Why, courting of 'e, to be sure.

CATHERINE [*gasping*]. You don't mane to say' you—

MR SAMPSON. Yes, I be, though. This fortnit come Sunday, if you'll kindly take it so, and no offence. [*To CAROLINE*] The very thing I was coming in to talk about. Cur'ous how things do turn out!

CATHERINE. But—we never noticed nothing.

MR SAMPSON. No—'tisin' to be supposed you would. 'Tis like the cooking, you see; I'm a terrible poor hand at it. Now 'tis out. Ben't vexed, I hope?

CATHERINE. Aw, no! But, Mr Sampson—

MR SAMPSON. There, think it over, will 'e? There's the saving to consider of, money and trouble both. And I've put by a pound or two. Not so young as I was, but we're none of us that. And not so dreadful old, nuther. Wouldn't think of parting you; reckon we would be pretty and comfor'ble together, the three of us, though, of course, I can't marry but one of 'e. So talk it over, will 'e? I'll be round agin this evening.

[*He disappears.* CAROLINE sits down, overwhelmed.

CATHERINE, after a moment of blank bewilderment, goes to the door and calls out.

CATHERINE. Mr Sampson! . . . Will 'e please come back for a minute!

MR SAMPSON [*returning*]. Well, marm?

CATHERINE [*greatly embarrassed*]. Ascuse my asking, but—would 'e mind telling *which* one you were thinking of—of courting?

MR SAMPSON. Now you'll be laughing upon me. Which one? Well, I don't know which one, and that's the truth. [*Cheerfully*] But it don't make no odds. 'Settle it between yourselves; I ben't noways partic'lar.

CATHERINE [*with an involuntary giggle*]. La, Mr Sampson! Whoever heard tell of such a thing?

[*She sits down.*

MR SAMPSON [*chuckling quietly*]. That's right. Laugh so much as you've a mind to. Sister laughing too? [*He peers at CAROLINE, who titters nervously.*]

Now we're comfor'ble. Reckon I can step inside now and no scandal. [*He shuts the door, takes a chair, spreads his hands on his knees, and surveys the sisters with a broad-beaming countenance.*] Yes, I'm like the cat in the bonfire—don't know which course to steer. I've turned it over this way, and I've rolled it over that way, and I can't come to no conclusion. Always seeing of e' together, you see, I can't part 'e nohow, no more than milk from water. But it don't matter, as I said. If you'll be so kind as to settle it up between yourselves—

CATHERINE [*emphatically*]. We couldn' do that.

MR SAMPSON [*with an inquiring glance at CAROLINE*]. Couldn' 'e, now?

CAROLINE [*shaking her head*]. 'Twouldn' be proper.

MR SAMPSON [*resignedly*]. Well, you know best. Only I don't azackly see—Hm!

[*With his eyes on the ground, he ponders over the problem. The sisters, tensely still, stare straight before them. He lifts his head and looks in CAROLINE'S direction.*]

CAROLINE [*hurriedly, without meeting his eye*]. Cath'rine's the best to manage things.

[*He looks hopefully at CATHERINE.*]

CATHERINE [*in haste*]. Caroline's the best cook by far.

MR SAMPSON [*thumping his knee*]. That's where 'tis! The pair of 'e rolled up together'd make a complete masterpiece; a man couldn' look for a better wife than what the two of 'e'd make. That's where 'tis; nor I can't see no way out of it—not in a Christian country. [*Meditatively*] Ah, these heathen Turks—they know a thing or two arter all, don't they?

CATHERINE [*greatly shocked*]. Mr Sampson, I wonder at 'e!

MR SAMPSON. 'Tisn' to be thought of, I know that. But I can't think upon no other way. [*A bright idea strikes him.*] Without we should spin up a ha'penny and bide by the fall of 'un.

CATHERINE [*more shocked than ever*]. Never in this house!

MR SAMPSON. Don't see how we shouldn'. 'Tis just the same as casting lots, and that's a good Scripture observance. The reg'lar way with these old patriarchs, so I'm given to understand—only 'twas shekels with them, I reckon. But shekels or ha'pennies, 'tis all one.

CATHERINE [*dubiously*]. 'Tis uncommon like pitch-and-toss, and I can't fancy Abraham and Isaac a-doing of it. But if you're sure 'tis Scriptural——

MR SAMPSON. Sound Bible doctrine, my word for it! [*To CAROLINE*] An't that so, marm?

CAROLINE [*shyly*]. I mind a text in Proverbs which do say, "The lot causeth contentions to cease."

MR SAMPSON [*triumphantly*]. See there, now! "The lot causeth contentions to cease!" Aimed straight at our case! Out of Proverbs too! Old Solomon's the chap for we! See how he settled that argyment about the baby! And there was two ladies in that! Well, then? [*He looks inquiringly at CATHERINE, who shakes her head dubiously, but offers no further opposition. He feels in his pocket, produces a handful of coins, chooses one, and holds it up.*] Now, if 'a should turn up the old Queen, then 'tis Cath'rine; but if 'tis the young lady with the pitch-fork, then Caroline's the one. And up she goes! [*He spins the coin, but blunders in his attempt to catch it. It falls in a corner. He goes down on his hands and knees to recover it, while the sisters sit valiantly struggling to retain their composure.*] Well, I'm darned! [*He rises to his feet, holding out the half-penny.*] If it had been a lime-ash floor, now!

CATHERINE [*faintly*]. What's wrong?

MR SAMPSON. Fell in a crack in the floor, my dear. Sticking there edge up, and no head to 'un, nor yet no tail. Old Solomon himself couldn' make nothing by 'un. But how come you to have a timber-floor to your kitchen when mine's lime-ash?

CAROLINE. 'Twas Father's doing when the houses

were built. He always liked to take his boots off of a evening, and lime-ash is that cold-natured, 'tis apt to give 'e chilblains through your stockings.

MR SAMPSON [*sitting down*]. Well, to see how things do turn out!

CAROLINE [*solemnly*]. 'Twas ordained!

CATHERINE [*with equal solemnity*]. A token, sure enough! And Father's eyes upon us this very minute, I shouldn' wonder. Mr Sampson, I doubt 'tis all foolishness, and we'd best say no more about it.

MR SAMPSON. I don't see that. If your father didn' choose to wear slippers that an't no lawful reason why I shouldn' get married if I want to. Must try some other way, that's all. [*He ponders.*]

CAROLINE [*timidly*]. If we should wait a bit, Mr Sampson keeping away from us meanwhile, p'raps his heart would speak.

MR SAMPSON [*dubiously*]. So 'a might; and then, agin, 'a mightn'. A mazy old organ, 'a b'lieve.

CATHERINE. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, so they say.

MR SAMPSON. That's very well; but how if 'a should make it grow fonder of both of 'e? Where'd us be then? But we'll try if you like, though I fear 'tisin' much use. [*Rising*] Queer state of things, to be sure! Like one of these mixed-up old yarns in the story-books. Some capital yarns in these story-books, though I'm given to understand they're mostly lies; and by what I can see—

CATHERINE [*stamping her foot*]. I've no patience with 'e, drollin' along with your story-books when you ought to be down on your hands and knees asking our pardon for bringing us to such a pass! A man of your age, and don't know how to make up his own mind! I've no patience with 'e!

MR SAMPSON [*gazing at her admiringly*]. Ah! Some spirit there! You make me feel as if I was home again, living with my sister. She's just such another. Many's the time she've lerruped me across the head with the

rolling-pin when I wasn' quick enough about something to please her. And nobody ever made a better wife than she—twice over too. I wonder, now—
[*He continues to stare reflectively at CATHERINE, until, on CAROLINE'S making an involuntary movement, he transfers his gaze to her.*] Well, I don't know. Like to like, they say, and I'm a quiet one myself. And so fur as looks do go. . . . [*He looks from one to the other, scratching his head.*] Aw, I don't know. [*To CAROLINE*] Well, marm, there an't nothing else for it that I can see, so we'll try your plan. [*He goes to the door and pauses there.*] All the same, I can't help wishing I'd been born a heathen Turk.

[*He goes out. The sisters remain sitting in silence. For the first time in their lives a veil of reserve is drawn between them, and each is obviously constrained and uncomfortable in the other's presence, CATHERINE is the first to stir.*]

CATHERINE [*rising and speaking stiffly*]. Getting on for half-past four. Time to pitch baking.

CAROLINE [*rising and going on with her preparations*]. I'll make a heavy cake, I reckon.

CATHERINE [*sniffing contemptuously*]. You can if you've a mind to. I've no opinion of your heavy cake, nor never had; you know that. But please yourself.

CAROLINE [*frightened, but holding her own*]. I'll make one, 'a b'lieve. [*She goes to the cupboard.*] Where's the flour?

CATHERINE. In the basket, of course? Where else should 'a be? [*She picks up the basket, sets it on the table with a bang, and distributes the various parcels, some on the table, some in the cupboard.*] There! Paddle away with your old heavy cake! I'm going to see to the chickens.

[*She goes out by the side-door.*]

CAROLINE [*letting her hands fall suddenly in the midst of her preparations, and miserably appealing to the clock*]. Aw, Grandf'er! What's up with sister that she

should spake so sharp to me ? And what's up with me ? I nearly answered her back ! . . . Aw, me ! [*She continues her work listlessly.*] 'Twon't be much of a cake, I fear, Grandf'er. I don't hardly know what I'm doing. . . . There ! If I hadn' nearly forgot the eggs !

[*She goes out by the side-door, and returns immediately with a basket of eggs, one of which she breaks into a cup. As she is doing so CATHERINE returns, casts a rapid glance at the table, and hardens into stone at the sight of the egg-basket.*

CATHERINE [*in a tense whisper, pointing at the basket*]. You've been taking those Wyandotte eggs !

CAROLINE [*after a horrified pause, faintly*]. S'posing I have !

CATHERINE [*raising her voice*]. You know very well I was going to set Topsy on those eggs to-day !

CAROLINE [*trembling, and clutching the table for support*]. S'posing I did !

CATHERINE [*in a still higher key*]. Then how come you to take those eggs ?

CAROLINE. I—I shall take what eggs I've a m-mind to—so there !

CATHERINE [*on her top note, without any stops*]. A mean trick so 'tis to take my eggs what I'd been saving up for Topsy and she in her box this very minute as you do very well know wearing her heart and feathers out over the chaney nest-egg, the poor fond little beauty ! Of all the mean tricks, to take my eggs—

CAROLINE [*with a wretchedly poor attempt at sarcasm*]. Aw, you and your bistly old eggs ! —

[*She bursts into tears.*

CATHERINE [*running to her*]. Sister ! Sister dear ! [*They embrace and mingle their tears.*] To think of it ! All these years with never a cross word, and now—Aw, drat the man !

CAROLINE [*shocked*]. Sister !

CATHERINE [*revelling in her profanity*]. Drat the man,

I say! I wish we'd never set eyes upon 'um! Sarve him right if we sent him about his business.

CAROLINE. Sister! When we've both as good as promised to him! [*She sits down.*] Besides, he wouldn' go. He's awful obstinate, for all his quiet ways.

CATHERINE [*viciously*]. A week's notice'll settle him quick enough.

CAROLINE. Cath'rine, we couldn'! Good man—to be slighted by two in one day, and be turned out of house and home beside! We couldn'!

CATHERINE [*relenting*]. It do seem hard. But we can't go on like this, that's plam.

CAROLINE. P'raps he'll make up his mind after all.

CATHERINE. That'd be worse and worse. He can't choose but one of us; and then where'll the other be? Tell me that.

CAROLINE [*drawing a long breath*]. Sister dear—I—I ben't in no partic'lar violence to get married.

CATHERINE [*sternly*]. Caroline Stevens, there's the Bible 'pon the shelf. Lay your hand to 'un and say that agin if you can.

CAROLINE [*hiding her face in her hands*]. I—can't!

CATHERINE. No; and the same for me. And here we be, the two of us, careering around arter one man. At our age too—'tis shameful! Two silly old women—that's what we are!

CAROLINE [*shuddering*]. Aw, don't, sister!

CATHERINE [*relentlessly*]. Two—silly—old—women! But it shan't be so! Thanks be, I've got some sense left in my brain, though my heart's a caudle of foolishness. It shan't be so. The longer he stay the worse 'twill be. How couldn' he make up his mind before he spoke? 'Twouldn' have happened so then.

CAROLINE. 'Twas forced upon him to speak.

CATHERINE. So 'twas. I mustn' be hard upon him. 'Twas Doom, I reckon; and better if Doom should keep to his battles and murders and sudden deaths, 'stead of coming and plaguing quiet, dacent folk like me. Well, Doom shan't have it all his own way, nuther. There

shan't be no jealous wife nor no sinful-thoughted sister-in-law in this locality.

CAROLINE. Sister! Such dreadful talk!

CATHERINE. 'Tis my duty to spake plain. There's bound to be suffering come out of it, but anyhow we can choose to suffer respectable. Go he shall!

CAROLINE [*at the window*]. Cath'rine! He's coming back! And, aw, if I do live, he've got gloves on!

CATHERINE. Gloves! Then he've made up his mind already! But it's too late now, and he shan't name no name, not if I can stop him. 'Twill be harder still if we know. [*Rapidly, in a low voice*] Now, Caroline, you're too soft for this job. You leave him to me; don't say a word, and, whatever you do, don't start crying. We've got to be hard or we'll never get rid of him. Hoosh!

[*They brace themselves for the ordeal. The door opens, and MR SAMPSON appears. His hands are encased in enormous black kid gloves; a substantial cabbage rose adorns the lapel of his coat; his face is one consistent solid smile.*

CATHERINE [*with a rush*]. Mr Sampson, you'll kindly take a week's notice from to-day.

[*His smile slowly crumbles, and is as slowly replaced by an expression of ineffable astonishment. His eyes search the room for symptoms of universal disintegration. CAROLINE begins to whimper.*

MR SAMPSON [*feebly*]. I'm a dazy old bufflehead, I know; and I don't azackly seem to get to the rights o' this.

CATHERINE [*wildly*]. There an't no rights to it! Will 'e stop snooling, sister! 'Tis all as wrong as can be, and time to put an end to it. Nor you mustn' ask why, for we never can tell 'e. We're grieved to put 'e out in any way, and we're grieved to part with 'e; but go you must, and no questions asked.

MR SAMPSON [*collecting himself, and speaking with*

quiet dignity]. If I ben't mistook, marm, there was words passed between us consarnin matrimony.

CATHERINE. Foolish words! Foolisher words never were spoke! They've got to be took back.

MR SAMPSON [*continuing stolidly*]. If I ben't mistook I was told to go away and make up my mind—or my heart, as you may say—if so be I could.

CATHERINE. It's too late. Say no more about it, and we'll be thankful to 'e all our lives.

MR SAMPSON [*glancing for corroboration first at his buttonhole, then at his gloves*]. If I ben't mistook I've now returned to say I've come to a conformable conclusion at last. I've come to say—with doo respect to the other lady, who's good enough for anybody—I've come to say I've pitched my ch'ice on the lady I should wish to commit matrimony with. And the name of that lady——

CATHERINE [*interrupting him, with her hands shielding her ears*]. Don't! You mustn't! You shan't! 'Tis hard enough already; don't go to make it harder. Whichever 'tis, her answer have got to be "No." An't that so, Caroline? [CAROLINE assents speechlessly. CATHERINE continues in a softer tone.] With best thanks all the same, and hoping you won't think too hardly of 'us, and never shall we think other than kindly of you, and proud we'd have been, ayther one of us, if it hadn' been ordained otherwise, as you'll mind we said to once when the ha'penny stood on edge, and—— Aw, will 'e go, and not stand staring there like a stuck pig!

MR SAMPSON [*stiffening his back*]. Very well, marm, [He begins peeling off his gloves.] I ben't one to force myself on nobody. [*Intent on the gloves*] Nor I ben't going to state no grievances . . . nor ask no questions . . . nor mention no names.

[He rolls the gloves up in a ball.

CATHERINE [*sniffing*]. You'll spile 'em. Give 'em here.

[She takes the gloves from him, smoothes them out, lays them together, turns one neatly

inside out over the other, and gives them back to him.

MR SAMPSON. Thank 'e. Bought 'em for a funeral I didn' go to; never put 'em on till to-day. [*Putting them in his pocket*] Queer how things do turn out. . . . Well, if I got to go, then the sooner the better. [*Taking the flower from his coat and laying it on the table*] Meant for the lady of my ch'ice, not to mention no names. . . . The sooner the better; so I reckon I'll be off now. [*Fumbling in his pocket*] I can get a bed at the inn down yonder—capital beds at the inn, so I'm told—and I'll send up for my bits of things later on. [*Counting out some silver on the table*] Three shillings—rent for this week and next, according to the law of the land.

CATHERINE [*quite overcome*]. Mr Sampson, we couldn' think of taking—

MR SAMPSON [*raising an implacable hand*]. If you please, marm, according to the law of the land, and not wishing to be beholden to nobody. And that's about all, I think. [*At the door*] Good-bye.

CATHERINE. Won't 'e shake hands before you go?

MR SAMPSON. No, I don't think so. 'Tis the Christian thing to do, I know; but there an't no mistake about it—I ought to have been born a heathen Turk.

[*He goes out. A miserable silence, broken at last by CAROLINE'S wailing voice.*]

CAROLINE. He'll scorn us all his life!

CATHERINE [*valiantly defying her own misery*]. We've done what's right, so it don't matter what he think of us. I don't care, for one.

[*The discarded flower catches her eye. She takes it up and lifts it to her face.*]

CAROLINE [*putting out her hand*]. Give it to me. I'll take care of it.

CATHERINE [*whipping it behind her back*]. Meant for the lady of his ch'ice. Maybe you think—

CAROLINE. I've so much right as you to think—

[They confront each other with hostile looks. The crisis passes, with CAROLINE in a renewed fit of sobbing, with CATHERINE in resolute action.]

CATHERINE. It shan't be so ! *[She goes to the fire and drops the flower in.]* And there's a end to it all, and a proper end too—dust and ashes. And now, sister, crying won't help us, but work will, or so they say else. Time to get on with the baking. Come, bustle !

[The curtain falls as they silently set to work.]

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

A PLAY OF THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

By RACHEL FIELD

CHARACTERS

THE BOUND-OUT GIRL

THE PEDLAR

THE WIDOW BOGGS

HIRAM, *the Widow Boggs' son*

SCENE : *A New England kitchen in the early eighteenth-hundreds. The curtain falls to denote the passing of some eight hours.*

Miss RACHEL FIELD's little play makes a powerfull appeal to the youthful imagination, because it dramatizes youth's greatest temptation. Mephistopheles may offer the choice between hard work and pleasure, or between poverty and luxury, but the most terrible alternative is between a life of comfortable security expressed in prose and a life of romantic adventure expressed in poetry. The strolling fiddler, with his wistful melody, represents the call to renounce a safe existence in order to live. It is the great gamble—the Prunella theme. Miss Tennyson Jesse handled the same subject in her first novel *The Milky Way*, though the musician in this story was a piper who played Dvorak's *Humoresque*.

Miss Field's appeal is to the emotions and sensibilities rather than to the intellect. Her poignant play "The Patchwork Quilt," included in the fourth series of *One-act Plays of To-day*, is another example of her gentle handling of the humour and pathos of daily life. "Cinderella Married," a delicate treatment of a great theme, may be considered one of the possible sequels to "The Londonderry Air."

Miss Field was not well known in this country until the appearance of her long novel *All This and Heaven Too*. In the film version it made an impression on millions to whom her name was previously quite unknown.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR¹

SCENE: *The kitchen of a remote New England farmhouse. It is a bright, sunshiny morning in the autumn, and a girl is rolling out dough at a table C.—a young girl in a plain, quaintly made calico dress and apron. Her hair is very red, and she is not pretty according to the plump, pink-and-white edicts of her day. She is light and quick of motion as she steps about from the table to an old brick oven, part of the great open fireplace which occupies most of the back wall. A crane and kettle hang there, and various pots and pans are piled in a sink or on another table down L.; there is also a couple of chairs. A churn stands in the corner, up R. some bits of blue-and-white china on shelves, and a red geranium in the window L. A door R. leads outdoors; this stands half open when the curtain rises. The door opposite up L. leads into another room of the house.*

GIRL [*singing with cheerful unconcern*].

"Hark from the tombs a doleful sound——

[*She punctuates the words by thumps with her rolling-pin.*

My ears attend the cry.

Ye living men come view the ground

Where you must shortly lie."

[*There is a knock at the door R., and a brown face suddenly peers round it. It is a thin face, with twinkling dark eyes and a shock of wild black hair. It is followed by a thin body in shabby clothes.*

MAN [*in a rich voice with a hint of brogue and a lingering relish over each phrase*]. Good day to you,

¹Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

Lady of the House, though it's a queer sort of a tune you do be singing.

GIRL. 'Tisn't a tune, mister; it's a hymn.

MAN. It is; more's the pity. I'm thinking the Lord God Himself wouldn't want to be claiming such a poor one.

GIRL [*shocked*]. Oh, dear, you hadn't ought to say things like that.

MAN. It's the truth, and I can speak it as well as the next one, though when it comes to lying I can do better nor most. [*He has pushed door wide, and is half in.*]

GIRL [*fearfully*]. If you're a tramp you mustn't come in.

MAN [*taking a step further*]. But I am in, colleen.

GIRL [*with the rolling-pin in her right hand*]. Then you must go right out again. The Widow Boggs doesn't like tramps.

MAN. Oh, doesn't she, now; it's a thousand pities.

GIRL. It's her kitchen, and you can't stay in it.

MAN [*persuasively*]. Well, now, I could be taking a bite on the doorstep. [*Pointing behind him.*]

GIRL. And I'm not to give victuals to any as asks.

MAN. I haven't been asking for any. [*Eyeing her carefully*] It's a queer thing, now, a young slip of a girl like you singing of death and the tomb on a fine September morning.

GIRL [*glancing towards window L.*]. I expect it is a nice morning. I've been too busy to go farther'n the back stoop.

MAN. There's a shine on every leaf and grass-blade that would be blindin' the two eyes in your head.

GIRL [*admiring him in spite of her scruples*]. I never heard a tramp talk like you before.

MAN [*grinning*]. Sure, an' there never was one the like o' me before. [*Drawing a step nearer*] Did you ever think o' that now, colleen—this great ball of a world ploughing its way through space and the centuries, an' never two creatures the same, never at all, at all?

GIRL [*looking at him wonderingly*]. Why, no, I never did. It's kind of solemn-sounding, like the Bible when the Reverend Simpson reads it Sundays. [*Suddenly she begins to sniff, remembering the cookies in the oven.*] Oh, mercy me, that batch'll be burned to a crisp! [*Leaving him to dart over to the Dutch oven, and taking out pan ruefully. The MAN draws nearer and also sniffs.*] Oh, my, they're black as anything!

[*About to bring them to the table C.*

MAN [*peering at them*]. I don't suppose you'd be letting me taste a few. I've got no objection to a little healthy char, especially when I made my breakfast of green apples four hours back.

GIRL [*looking again at him and hesitating as she brings pan to table*]. There couldn't be any harm in that exactly. [*She sets them down before him.*] Only you mustn't pass on the word you got anything. We don't hold with tramps round here.

MAN [*seating himself comfortably on the stool R. of the table to eat*]. Not even when they've got a pack o' goods to peddle?

[*Pointing to the one he has left on doorstep.*

GIRL [*eyeing it curiously*]. The Widow Boggs says a pedlar will always try to cheat you, but I like to see what they have in their packs.

MAN [*eating the cookies with relish*]. Let you be giving me a sup from that pan of milk yonder [*pointing to the table down L.*], and I'll show you the lot with pleasure.

GIRL [*falling more and more under his spell*]. It's only buttermilk left from churning. [*Crossing to his right*] I dassent give you any other, for the Widow set the morning's herself. But you can have all o' this: I was just carryin' it out to the pig.

[*Bringing it over to him.*

MAN [*helping himself*]. Now, I wouldn't be the man to rob a pig. A pig's a fine animal, for all anyone may say, and a gifted one too. Did you ever hear how a pig is able to see the wind?

GIRL [*shaking her head*]. No.

MAN. It's as true as the nose on your face, and in Ireland they do be holding the pig in great reverence for it.

GIRL [*laughing out suddenly*]. 'Twould be funny if our old sow could! But how can you be sure?

MAN [*reprovingly*]. Just because I don't be havin' wisdom enough to understand a pig's talk I wouldn't be doubtin' its powers.

GIRL [*considering the matter*]. Hiram isn't like that. He doubts everything till he can prove it's so.

MAN [*pausing in his meal*]. Sure, an' it must be a very dull life he leads himself! Who might he be, now, colleen?

GIRL. He's the Widow Boggs' son.

MAN. An, it's a poor kind of a pair they must be makin'—not that I intend criticizing your relations after you treatin' me so pleasant.

GIRL. They're not my relations. [*Hesitating and going on a bit self-consciously*] Leastways, not yet, they ain't.

MAN [*regarding her curiously*]. Well, then, what would you be doing in their kitchen, and you no kin at all?

GIRL [*explaining as she rolls out more cookies*]. I've been the Widow Boggs' bound-girl for goin' on nine years. She took me from Cranberry Common when I was ten an' my folks died. I've been workin' for her ever since to earn my board an' keep an' clothes.

MAN [*shrewdly*]. I'm thinkin' the Widow Boggs is a woman to drive a sharp bargain, but what about this son of hers?

GIRL [*shyly, pausing in her work*]. Hiram an' me are goin' to get married soon's the crops are all in.

MAN. Is that the truth, now! An' what sort of a man is he?

GIRL [*proudly, but with no great show of enthusiasm*]. Oh, he's very steady an' dependable. I'm lucky, every

one thinks—what with bein' only a bound-out girl an' havin' red hair into the bargain.

[*Smoothing an escaping lock from her forehead.*]

MAN. Sure, an' 'tis great glory on your head, colleen. Didn't you be knowin' that?

GIRL [*wonderingly*]. No, mister, it's not considered that hereabouts. But Hiram says he'll overlook it, seein' I'm broke to his ways, an' the Widow Boggs says maybe if I don't go runnin' out bareheaded in the sun, an' if I comb it night an' mornin' with an iron comb, maybe in time it'll darken to a decent shade.

MAN. God forbid! In the old country they do be callin' it a queen's colour. My own grandmother had the same—God rest her soul! [*crossing himself piously, then continuing with relish*] Many's the time I've heard her tell how 'twas held to be a sign of blessing from the Fairy Folk themselves, an' the redder it was the more power you would be havin' over them.

GIRL. If I told that to Hiram an' the Widow they'd never believe me.

MAN [*philosophically, taking another cookie*]. Then it would be a waste o' good breath.

GIRL [*sighing and cutting out more cookies*]. Maybe it would be, mister.

MAN [*curiously*]. An' why would they be leavin' you to keep the house here by yourself?

GIRL [*in matter-of-fact tones*]. Oh, they've gone to Mis' Sally Robbins' funeral a couple of miles down the road. But I couldn't leave the bakin'.

[*The MAN gives a dramatic start in his chair.*]

MAN [*solemnly*]. Is it the truth you're tellin' me, colleen?

GIRL [*surprised*]. Why, yes, mister, they never like to miss a funeral.

MAN [*wagging his head wisely*]. I might have known it. The third sign to-day!

GIRL [*curiously*]. What sign?

MAN [*impressively*]. Did you never hear how the

first person you'll be talking to on the road to a funeral is bound to be bringing you great good fortune?

GIRL [*shaking her head*]. No, an' I've been to funerals and funerals.

MAN [*easily*]. Then you were never meeting with the right person, surely. [*Continuing*] An' maybe you'll be tellin' me what day o' the month it is, in case I might be wrong in my own calculations.

GIRL. It's the thirteenth o' September. I know it, 'count o' the funeral, an' because Hiram said we'd better be settin' our weddin'-day for a month from now.

MAN [*wagging his head*]. Then I made no mistake. The thirteenth it is, an' that's my lucky day, colleen. My grannie read it in the stars, an' me a bit of a lad squattin' cross-legged before the peat fire in County Clare. "Michael O'Donovan Patrick Sweeney," says she, "there's luck for you in the thirteenth day of the month as long as there's breath in your body. Born on the thirteenth you were, an' wedded on the thirteenth you'll be." I was mindin' myself of her words this very mornin' as I took up my pack an' started off. But that wasn't the only sign, for I hadn't so much as made the first turning when what should I see in a field but a great black cow. Stock-still she stood, starin' at me, an' not so much as one white hair from the horns of her head to her switchin' tail.

GIRL. That must have been Squire Sawyer's old black Betsy.

MAN. It's rare good fortune to meet with an all-black cow, an' when it's the thirteenth day o' the month as well there's sure to be something more nor common in it.

GIRL. I'm glad you told me. I'll watch out from now on. [*She carries pan of cookies to the oven up C.*]

MAN [*watching her more and more approvingly*]. You've a light foot, I see [*pointing to it*], an' a well-turned ankle. I'm thinkin' you can dance better nor most?

GIRL [*pleased, but firm*]. We don't hold with dancin' much in these parts. Folks think it's sinful, besides bein' a waste o' time an' shoe-leather.

MAN [*snorting*]. An' that's all they know about it, bad cess to the lot of them. Did you never read in the Bible how King David himself danced before the Lord?

GIRL [*doubtfully*]. But that was a long time ago. Times has changed.

MAN. I'm thinkin' the Lord God's not grown tired of a light foot an' a good bit of a tune. [*To her*] Don't you be likin' to hear one yourself now?

GIRL. I'm very fond of music. [*Confidingly*] Hiram's promised me a melodeon, so's I can learn to play hymns on it this winter.

MAN [*scornfully*]. Hymns, is it? I'll teach you better nor that, colleen. [*Eagerly*] Tunes, why my head's ringin' with them day an' night! I've only to pick them the same as you would be gatherin' berries off a bush. There isn't a mood you'd be havin' on you but I could be findin' a tune to suit it. An' what's a melodeon compared to a fiddle but the light a tallow candle would make, an' it gutterin' in the face of the moon?

GIRL [*wistfully*]. Do you carry your fiddle in your pack, mister?

MAN [*rising*]. Let you listen, an' I'll be playin' you the one they do be callin' *The Londonderry Air*. [*He goes to the doorstep, opens his pack, and returns with an old fiddle, which he begins to tune, talking as he tightens and plucks at the strings.*] You won't be hearin' the like of it anywhere nowadays. It's an old tune and a stolen tune, for they say Blind Shemus Dougherty brought it back, an' he spendin' seven years along o' the Fairies in the burnin' hill. It's merry and sad and queer, an' there's magic in it, colleen, for them that have the heart to hear.

GIRL [*wonderingly*]. But don't folks hear with their ears, mister?

MAN [*fitting the fiddle to his chin, and drawing his*

stool away from the table]. It's only them as listens with the heart that hears the true magic. An' a heart does be needin' music the same as the grass does be needin' rain.

[*He draws the bow across the strings and plays the haunting strains of "The Londonderry Air," now gay and quick, like an old reel, now low and minor and lingering. He sways to the rhythms as he plays, and his eyes never leave the GIRL's face as she stands spellbound before him, her two little floury hands clasped rapturously upon her calico chest. As the tune ends she draws a deep breath, and turns half-dazed, shining eyes to him.*

GIRL [*softly*]. Oh, mister, 'twas like everythin' in the world, an' more beside.

MAN [*approvingly*]. Then you listened with the heart, colleen. Every little note it did be fallin' upon it like a sweet rain.

GIRL [*still wondering*]. Yes, it watered my heart. I could feel it. [*Pressing her hands there*] I knew what the music means as long as you played, but now I can't remember. Only, nothin'll ever be the same again now I've heard it.

MAN [*putting down fiddle*]. You'll be knowin' I speak the truth when I tell you a fiddle's better nor a melodeon. Isn't it so, now? [*Turning to her questioningly*] I might be makin' so bold as to call you by name, if I could be knowin' of it?

GIRL [*leaning on the table, staring out in front, still under the music's spell*]. Martha Rose.

MAN. Sure, it's pretty an' suits you well, only I'd be turnin' it round about an' call you Rose Martha, if I had my way.

GIRL. Hiram likes plain Martha best, so I'll be leavin' out the Rose once we're married.

MAN. It's a pity—there's never enough roses in the world, not even in June.

GIRL [*suddenly rousing herself*]. Oh, mercy me, if I haven't gone an' let another pan o' cookies go up in smoke! [*She runs to oven and takes them out guiltily.*] I never did burn two whole pans in all my life before!

MAN [*watching her take them out*]. I'm thinkin' they're past hope, even for the likes o' my stomach!

GIRL [*throwing the panful into fire*]. The Widow Boggs'd scold me for a week steady if she smelt 'em.

[*Opening the window, she returns to table and rolls out more.*]

MAN [*touching her hand as she rolls the dough*]. Let you be turnin' over your palm, an' I'll tell your fortune for you.

[*GIRL starts to do so, then draws back, MAN begins coaxing her.*]

Come, now, 'twon't cost you a penny, an' you needn't be afraid. I can see it's a fine one you'll be having.

GIRL [*hesitating*]. 'Tisn't that, mister: it's the Widow Boggs an' Hiram. They don't believe in tellin' fortunes. They say it's wicked an' bad as breakin' a commandment.

MAN. An' who are they to be passin' judgment the same as the Lord God Himself?

GIRL [*nervously*]. Oh, you hadn't ought to be so blasphemous.

MAN. Lord bless me, what do you want me to say?

GIRL. You could just say, "Bless me."

MAN. Well, bless me, then, give over your little floury paw.

GIRL [*doing so half fearfully*]. Can you see it all there, plain as in writin'?

MAN [*bending over it*]. Plainer nor writin' it is, Rose Martha, an' there's a long life here an' a happy one, an' a marriage—[*he darts her a quick look, which she is too absorbed to note*] with a dark, thin sort of a man.

GIRL [*softly to herself*]. That's queer! Hiram's short an' square, an' what hair he has is light.

MAN [*going on with renewed vigour*]. But that's not the half of what I'm seeing. There's travel here, an'

the roads of all the world from white May to red October. An' you walkin' of them with the dark man by your side, an' there's music, an' the dancin' of many feet——

GIRL [*nervously*]. But, mister, supposin' that—that I was to marry a fairish man.

MAN [*stubbornly*]. I see it written plain—you'll be mating with a dark man.

GIRL. But how can it be when Hi——

MAN [*breaking in*]. You can't be askin' a how and a why of Fate. Those were my grannie's very words to me, an' she tellin' me a strange fortune of a land across the sea, an' a girl with hair like little flames an' as many freckles as there are stars on the Milky Way.

GIRL [*startled*]. Did she tell you that?

MAN. She did, an' more beside. "There'll be the sound of flowers in her name, lad," my old grannie said, "an' a plain bit of a thorny one too, so you'll be makin' no mistake" [*watching the effect of this upon her and seeming pleased. Suddenly he drops her hand, draws her to him, and kisses her full on the mouth*].

GIRL [*faintly, as he lets her go*]. Oh, mister, oh!

MAN [*watching her with shining eyes*]. Look at me, bound-girl. Have they kept you shut up in their four walls so long you can't be tellin' love when you're meetin' with it?

GIRL [*faltering*]. I'm—frightened, mister.

MAN. I wouldn't be harmin' a hair o' your head, an' every one a candle to light you to Paradise.

GIRL. 'Tain't you I'm scared of—it's me. [*In almost a whisper*] I'm feelin' things that I hadn't ought to feel—not with me an' Hiram cried three times a'ready in meetin' [*looking at him beseechingly, but with growing emotion*].

MAN [*catching her hands and speaking with sudden contrition*]. Listen to me well, colleen. Maybe I didn't be tellin' you all I saw. There's cold an' hunger written there too, for a road can be a lonesome dark place an' you a long way from any lighted door—an' maybe then

they'll be shutting it in your face. An' you not growing young with the years.

GIRL [*slowly*]. But everybody grows old some time, don't they, mister?

MAN [*drawing her closer to him*]. I couldn't be denyin' that, an' I wouldn't be changing the road for the finest farm in your country or a grand house in Boston or Philadelphia.

GIRL [*hesitatingly*]. But supposin' you get hungry, mister?

MAN [*significantly*]. An empty belly's a hard thing, but it's nothin' to a heart that never had its fill o' love.

GIRL [*still objecting, though nearly won over*]. An' there's winter comin' on.

MAN [*twinkling*]. Sure, an' I wouldn't be above takin' a hint or two from the birds an' beatin' my way south.

GIRL [*still hesitant*]. But birds are different, mister: they got wings.

MAN [*persuasively*]. We'll be following after the sun and the warm winds, Rose Martha, an' some day we'll be comin' to a village where the women have got kindly eyes an' the cattle are fat an' the barn do be full. An' I'll turn my hand to tinkering again and fiddling for weddings and dances the winter through. Sure, we'll be earnin' our food an' a warm bed in the hay o' nights—whisperin' together thoughts the like we wouldn't be havin' at all in your great four-poster beds.

GIRL [*fascinated, but still doubtful*]. You're askin' me to leave a lot, mister. 'Tisn't every girl gets a chance like mine.

MAN [*quickly*]. 'Tisn't every girl I'm asking to go with me. [*Wheedling*] An' as to that, I'll be givin' you gifts too—fine gifts the sort every girl wouldn't be gettin' for her marriage. The four winds o' heaven, I'll be givin' you, an' twisty brown roads, an' the sight of hills an' green islands an' the wrinklins' old sea. You'll be gettin' the song o' birds an' the smell o' flowers an' music for the asking.

GIRL [*drawing a deep breath*]. You do make it sound just beautiful, mister.

MAN [*eloquently*]. Beautiful it is. It's not every day you'll be gettin' the whole earth offered to you. The Widow Boggs an' her son they'll be keepin' you a bound-girl all your days, but I'll be settin' you free.

GIRL [*desperately*]. Oh, mister, I want to be goin' along o' you, only——

MAN [*breaking in*]. Well, then, what's to stop you? There's a parson in the next country will join our hands, an' I've a little ring in my pack would be just the fit o' your finger.

GIRL. There's Hiram an'—— [*Stopping short suddenly at the sound of distant approaching wheels. She darts to the door, peers out, and returns to him all agitation.*] It's them. They're just comin' over the rise o' the hill. I didn't look for 'em back so soon. They mustn't find you here, mister; there'd be a terrible to-do, an' maybe they'd have you locked up in gaol.

MAN. An' maybe they wouldn't, colleen.

[*The girl is dragging his pack in and pushing him towards other door, the one to the house.*]

GIRL. You can let yourself out the front way when you hear them drive in the barn.

MAN [*gathering up his fiddle and pack*]. Well, I'll go, for I wouldn't want to be bringing trouble on you, bound-girl. But I'll be back—after the fall o' the dark, when the crickets do be liftin' their wee voices against the cold.

GIRL [*standing at the door R. and listening tensely*]. Yes, mister, only you've got to go now; they've passed the bridge.

MAN [*reaching door up L. and turning to her*]. Let yourself be choosin' between the two of us, an' if it's me you're taking listen for *The Londonderry Air* that I'll be playin' under the sign-post where the roads meet.

GIRL [*urging him into the other room*]. Oh, hurry, please hurry, mister! They're turnin' in the gate!

MAN [*shouldering his pack and waving from*]

the door]. An' whichever one of us it is, here's my thanks for the cakes an' milk an' the fine conversation.

[Exit up L.

[As he goes the wheels sound very near. The GIRL hurriedly carries away his empty glass and pan. She returns to the table and begins to roll more cookies vigorously as the lights fade out.

[The CURTAIN falls to denote a lapse of time—some eight hours.

[It rises a moment later, showing the same kitchen about seven o'clock in the evening. The fire glows pleasantly, candles are lighted on mantel and table, and the WIDOW BOGGS, a large, powerful old woman with grey hair, spectacles, and a stern expression, is kneading bread at the table. Supper-dishes are piled at the sink. From the room beyond come the none too harmonious strains of a wailing melodeon, being played by very uncertain hands. The tune is scarcely recognizable in the frequent discords. The WIDOW BOGGS calls out loudly in a harsh old voice as she thumps the last loaf into the pans.

WIDOW BOGGS. If you don't leave that organ this minute an' come an' wash the supper-dishes I'll tell Hiram to take it right back where it come from! [Raising her voice] You hear me, Marthy?

[GIRL's voice from the other room as organ stops.

GIRL. Yes, 'um.

WIDOW BOGGS [still grumbling]. I'll never hear it without it puts me in mind of Mis' Robbins' funeral an' the trouble we had luggin' it home an' all.

[The GIRL appears in the doorway, flushed and curiously shiny about the eyes. She is dressed as she was in the morning, but her whole bearing is different. She is all a-tingle with suppressed excitement. HIRAM follows close behind her, a heavy, clumsy youth in waist-

coat and shirt-sleeves. His hair is pale and his expression dull and stubborn. At present he is completely under his mother's thumb, but he will in time become a bully.

GIRL. I ain't forgot the dishes, Missis Boggs [*quietly, as she moves towards the sink on table R.*]

WIDOW BOGGS [*crossly*]. 'Twouldn't be the first time you had.

HIRAM [*lighting a corn-cob pipe*]. Oh, Ma, can't you leave her be? I wanted she should try playin' some more.

WIDOW BOGGS. You must be either deaf or crazy, Hiram, an' I dunno but what one's bad as t'other.

GIRL [*apologetically*]. I can't seem to make it sound right nohow, but maybe when Miss Peters shows me where to put my fingers——

WIDOW BOGGS [*setting bread-pans on hearth*]. There'll be no livin' in this house then, but o' course my feelin's ain't to be considered no more—not now you've got Hiram hooked, an' upset his mind so's he's willin' to pay out three pounds for Mis' Robbins' old organ. Another good churn an' spinnin'-wheel would be more sensible, I say.

HIRAM [*crossly*]. Oh, Ma, I wish't you'd quit scoldin' about it.

WIDOW BOGGS [*commandingly*]. You go out'n the shed and fetch in another armful o' kindlin' wood. This fire's most out. [*HIRAM goes out, walking heavily. The WIDOW BOGGS covers the bread-pans with ostentatious effort.*] There's the bread set—'twas risin' all over the pans while you two was in the parlour.

GIRL. I was aimin' to do it soon's I had these cleared up.

WIDOW BOGGS. Always excuses—excuses. It's the same day in, day out, an' what it'll be when you're married I don't know, I'm sure.

GIRL [*absently over the dishes*]. Yes, 'um.

WIDOW BOGGS [*eyeing her sharply*]. What's come over you to-day? You've acted queer an' had a dreadful

guilty look ever since we come back from the funeral, an' what you did with your mornin' I don't know—only three pans o' cookies to show.

[HIRAM *returns with wood, cutting his mother short. He flings the wood down noisily, and stands watching the GIRL dry the dishes.*

HIRAM. Martha.

GIRL [*looking at him hopefully*]. Yes, Hiram.

HIRAM [*peering at her curiously*]. You look kinda feverish to-night, but it becomes you. Your freckles don't show near so much.

GIRL. You said you didn't mind 'bout my havin' so many.

HIRAM [*soberly*]. Well, an' so I don't. I told you I wouldn't let it make no difference in my feelin's. I was just remarkin' on it, that's all.

GIRL [*reflectively*]. There might be some folks would think they was a sign o' beauty.

HIRAM. That's foolishness.

GIRL [*wistfully*]. I 'spose you couldn't exactly admire my looks, Hiram?

HIRAM [*seating himself and speaking with heavy philosophy*]. 'Tisn't given to every woman to be beautiful.

GIRL [*with sudden spirit*]. An' 'tisn't given to every man to see beauty either!

HIRAM [*startled*]. You do act queer to-night, same's Mother said. You feel all right, I expect?

GIRL [*eagerly*]. Oh, yes, Hiram, but 'sposin' I didn't?

HIRAM [*stolidly*]. Well, but you just said you did. You can't feel two different kinds o' ways to once't.

GIRL [*hanging up the towel*]. I can feel lots o' ways to once't.

HIRAM [*exasperated*]. Now, Marthy, don't you commence gettin' flighty just's you was soberin' down so good an' quiet.

GIRL [*sighing and coming nearer*]. But I get tired always actin' the same, Hiram.

HIRAM. You'll get over that. Just wait till we're married an' Mother lets me run things. You'll have all the cookin' an' sewin' an' housework to do an' the children to look after. You won't have no time for fancies.

GIRL [*looking about her a little nervously*]. No, I guess I won't. [*Touching his arm hopefully*] Hiram, you was startin' to tell me somethin' when you come in, only your ma was here.

HIRAM [*putting his feet on bench, yawning*]. I kind of forget what 'twas.

GIRL [*hopefully, leaning against arm of his chair*]. 'Twasn't about love an'—an' us?

HIRAM [*stodgily*]. No, I know 'twasn't that.

GIRL [*urging him on*]. But you're sure you do love me, Hiram?

HIRAM [*with another great yawn*]. Didn't I tell you I did? Ain't once enough?

GIRL. But I like you to tell me lots o' times.

HIRAM [*crossly, as he fights off sleep*]. Well, that ain't my way, an' you'd ought to know it by this time.

GIRL [*thoughtfully*]. It takes a lot o' love to make folks happy.

HIRAM. M'—m—m. [*He is almost asleep, but she bends down and kisses him. He starts up.*] Gorrry, Marthy, I wish't you weren't always so sudden.

GIRL. Won't you kiss me back, Hiram?

HIRAM. Well.

[*He does so efficiently enough, but grudgingly. The GIRL is unstirred by it, and continues to regard him with a puzzled air of indecision.*]

GIRL. I wish't you'd say somethin'.

HIRAM [*irritated*]. Can't you leave off pesterin' me? [*GIRL drops back discouraged. He settles deeper into his chair.*] Why don't you try another tune on the organ?

GIRL. I guess I'd rather not.

HIRAM. Ma won't scold no more.

GIRL [*moving away to stand by the window*]. 'Tisn't

that: it makes such a loud noise. [*With a new note in her voice*] Did you ever hear a fiddle, Hiram?

HIRAM. Huh! [*Going on with an injured air.*] You're awful contrary after the trouble I took to get you an organ.

GIRL. I'm real grateful.

HIRAM [*suddenly rousing himself*]. I recollect it now—what I was goin' to tell you.

GIRL [*returning to him with hopeful expression*]. What was it, Hiram?

HIRAM. 'Twas about my coat there. [*Pointing to one hanging from a peg down R.*] I tore a regular barn-door in it on a nail in the Robbin's entry. I kep' my arm over it so's Ma didn't spy it, but I thought maybe you'd kinda draw it together for me now. I'll need it for church to-morrow.

[*The light slips from the GIRL's face. She goes over to the peg and takes down the coat, but there is a defiant set to her shoulders and a new firmness to her walk.*]

GIRL [*carrying it to the table*]. All right, Hiram, I'll mend it for you.

[*She takes up her work-basket and begins to sew quickly, with every now and then a look towards the dark window. HIRAM settles back comfortably with another enormous yawn. His eyes are shut. There is a pause, in which the crickets outside may be heard chirping loudly.*]

HIRAM [*sleepily*]. I'll be glad when those pesky crickets let up their everlastin' hollerin' out there.

GIRL [*with a reminiscent note in her voice*]. I like to hear 'em—singing against the cold.

HIRAM. Wish 'twould come an' freeze every last one of 'em.

GIRL [*quickly*]. No—no.

[*There is a hint of horror in her tones and in her eyes, as if she and the crickets were on a new and common footing.*]

HIRAM [*still more drowsily*]. You be sure an' fix it so's it won't show ?

GIRL [*bending over the work*]. I'll try to.

HIRAM [*mumbling and nearly asleep*]. An' you might see if the top button's on good an' strong.

GIRL [*absently*]. All right.

[*In another minute he is asleep. He does not snore, but his lumped body and heavy breathing tell plainly how it is with him. GIRL steals a long glance at him and speaks tentatively.*

Hiram ?

[*He does not make any sign, and she sighs and turns to the sewing again. Presently she finishes and sits with the coat across her lap and her head turned towards the window in a listening attitude. But there is no sound but the crickets till the WIDOW BOGGS' voice calls sharply from the other room.*

WIDOW BOGGS [*from off up L.*]. I expect you've gone and let Hiram fall asleep 'fore the fire again ?

GIRL [*still listening answering absently*]. Yes, 'um.

WIDOW BOGGS [*voice raised in complaint*]. Well, it'll take the two of us to rouse him once he's started.

GIRL. He was dreadful sleepy ; I couldn't help it.

WIDOW BOGGS. No, you never can. You're the most helpless of any bound-out girl I ever did have.

GIRL [*starting straight before her*]. Yes, 'um.

[*There is another brief pause, and then the music sounds faintly somewhere out in the darkness. It is "The Londonderry Air," clear and compelling. The GIRL is on her feet in an instant. Swiftly she carries HIRAM'S coat to its peg, taking her own long brown cloak down from its place and wrapping it about her. She gives a little apprehensive look towards the other room and HIRAM, who continues his sleep unsuspectingly. She moves noiselessly, as one in a happy daze.*

WIDOW BOGGS [*calling*]. D'you hear that noise?

GIRL [*she has reached the door R. and pauses there on the threshold tensely*]. Yes, 'um.

WIDOW BOGGS. Sounds like one o' them wanderin' pedlars or gipsies was round again.

[*GIRL's hands reach for the door-knob. There is a slight sound.*

What you doin'?

GIRL [*quietly, but with great scared eyes and hand to her wildly beating heart*]. Listenin'.

WIDOW BOGGS [*continuing from without*]. Well, you might just step out an' make sure the barn's shut fast, long's there's prowlers about an' Hiram no good to us.

GIRL [*faintly*]. Yes, 'um.

[*She gives a quick look at the shadowy kitchen and the heavily lumped form of her betrothed. Then she opens the door and slips determinedly over the doorstep.*

WIDOW BOGGS [*voice still following her*]. You hear what I say, Marthy?

GIRL'S VOICE. Yes, 'um.

[*There is a queer little triumphant ring to the words as they drift back from the darkness.*

CURTAIN

THE Unnamed Society of Manchester, with which Mr Sladen-Smith has been intimately associated for a number of years, may be regarded as representing the anti-Naturalistic movement of the modern stage. The demand for 'reality' in the theatre produced a crop of plays which failed to satisfy because they were apt to be artistically formless and æsthetically sordid; hence the later reaction in favour of the fantastic, the poetic, and the romantic-historical.

Mr Sladen-Smith's plays are the expression of a vigorous and colourful imagination and an unusual sense of humour. He escapes from the twentieth century into the world of medievalism or Orientalism, where bright ideas are so much more important than fidelity to detail. Like Lord Dunsany, whom he most resembles, he generally chooses the one-act form as the best medium for fantasy, though he attempted a more sustained flight in "Wonderful Zoo" with considerable success.

In addition to writing plays, Mr Sladen-Smith has done ambitious work as a producer, and *The Amateur Producer's Handbook*, which he wrote in 1933, is an admirable exposition of the fundamental principles derived from his own experience. He is certainly one of the most distinguished artists which the modern amateur revival has produced.

THE POISON PARTY

A BURLESQUE COMEDY

By F. SLADEN-SMITH

CHARACTERS

THE QUEEN-MOTHER

A SERVANT

THE CARDINAL

THE KING

DENISE DE BEAUJOLIS

M. DE BEAUJOLIS

THE POISON PARTY¹

SCENE: A room in the royal palace.

Doors R. and L. and a big window C. back. There is a large table L. C. covered by a cloth of rich material, which drapes to the floor. There is a chair above the table, and another one L. of it. A second table is R.C.: this also has two chairs above and below. Armchair down R. These are the essentials, but appropriate furniture can be added if desired.

When the curtain rises the QUEEN-MOTHER is busy with a dish of cakes. She very carefully pours some powder into some of them from a large ring.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*above table, finishing her task*]. Ah! Skilful; extremely skilful! No one in the family could possibly have done it better. Well, destiny is always turning upon something, but this must be the first time it has turned upon a cheese-cake.

[*She strikes a bell on right of table.*

[A SERVANT enters R.

Send the Lord Prince Cardinal to me.

[The SERVANT exits R.

[The QUEEN-MOTHER strides down R., and back again to the table, looking at the ring. Then she takes up the cakes and regards them intently.

Toothsome morsels! [*Putting down the cakes and moving round to above table*] A pleasant feast, and then every problem solved. And not unpleasant really. A twinge, perhaps . . . but nothing like toothache. [*Sitting in chair above table*] I wonder I never thought of this method before. [The CARDINAL enters R.

¹Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

CARDINAL [*pausing at the door*]. Your Majesty has need of me ?

QUEEN-MOTHER. I have. Great need. Shut the door and come forward. [*She lifts up the dish of cakes.*] You see these cakes ?

CARDINAL [C.]. I do. Your Majesty's favourite dish.

QUEEN-MOTHER. What do you think it means ?

CARDINAL. That your Majesty is hungry.

QUEEN-MOTHER. It means that I have had enough.

CARDINAL. And left so many ? Rather unusual, isn't it ?

QUEEN-MOTHER. I am speaking with a double meaning.

CARDINAL. Very fashionable at the moment, I believe.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Never mind about that. What do you deduce ?

CARDINAL. The usual trouble.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Yes, but in an aggravated form.

CARDINAL. The King is incorrigible ?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Quite. What with his zoological specimens, his so-called domestic pets, his misplaced sense of humour, and his amazing amours, he is wearing me to shreds and patches.

CARDINAL [*looking at her*]. I assure you, no one would guess it.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Who should know better than you that beneath this possibly magnificent husk I am a weak, ailing woman, crushed beneath the heavy burden of infirmity and statecraft.

CARDINAL. Anyway, you conceal it very well.

QUEEN-MOTHER. The Blood Royal does not show its secret sorrows to the vulgar multitude.

CARDINAL. The eye of brass, the cheek of porcelain.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Where did you pick that up ?

CARDINAL. It's an Oriental metaphor.

QUEEN-MOTHER. I'm not sure I like it . . . eye of brass ? What is your Eminence thinking about ?

CARDINAL [*to distract her*]. Your troubles, madam, as always.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Ah, yes, my troubles. Well, there comes a time in every trouble when something must be done, and that swiftly. I assure you I can rise to an occasion.

CARDINAL. And every time you have done so the population has slightly decreased.

QUEEN-MOTHER. That never does any harm. Now, astonishing as it may seem, these little cakes mean that I am about to rise to the occasion once more . . . but you are not astonished?

CARDINAL. I am, technically, your Majesty. Actually, of course, a cardinal who was astonished would soon cease to be a cardinal.

QUEEN-MOTHER. There is something in that—but you must admit that these little cakes look innocent and appetizing.

CARDINAL. Your cook's famous cheese-cakes always look innocent and appetizing. Happy is he who is permitted to taste them.

QUEEN-MOTHER. You think so? Ha! Ha!

CARDINAL. Ha! Ha! Ha!

QUEEN-MOTHER. You don't often see a joke so promptly.

CARDINAL. Well, I've got an inkling, you know. After all, it's not the first time your Majesty has prepared a little food, is it?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Ah, but this is a much more attractive design than usual. For instance, you will observe that these cakes are laid out in a special manner.

CARDINAL [*moving to downstage R. corner of table and observing the dish*]. So they are. Arranged in the form of a letter M.

QUEEN-MOTHER. My initial.

CARDINAL. Very pretty and tasteful.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Each of these cakes contains a filling of lemon-cheese.

CARDINAL. Filling of lemon-cheese.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Each filling of lemon-cheese contains a small plum in the middle.

CARDINAL. Plum in the middle.

QUEEN-MOTHER. This echoing is undignified. Each plum, with the exception of the two at either end of the letter M, contains a deadly, potent poison.

CARDINAL [*moving up to the window, rubbing his hands*]. Really, it's quite like old times, isn't it?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Do you know, I couldn't help feeling that when I began the work. But, having followed me so far, my lord, possibly you can follow me further.

CARDINAL. Well, well . . . obviously those tarts are intended for some one.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*with heavy sarcasm*]. This is brilliance indeed.

CARDINAL. The question is: for whom are they intended?

QUEEN-MOTHER. One of them is for you.

CARDINAL [*amazed*]. Oh, really! I say! Your Majesty!

QUEEN-MOTHER. One of the untouched ones, of course. The other untouched one is for me. The rest are intended for the infamous Denise de Beaujolais and her disgusting father.

CARDINAL. The King's fancy has turned in that direction?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*rising*]. I discovered it last week. Oh, it is too much! He is out of his senses. Denise de Beaujolais queening it over me, her old father prancing down these corridors. . . . [*Walking up and down*] Too much! Do you realize, my lord, that within a month of that woman attaining complete ascendancy over the King I should be requested to enter a nunnery? Could there be a greater misfortune?

CARDINAL. There could not—for the nunnery.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Let the King have his dogs, his cats, his leopards, his private zoo, even the Duchess de Briancourt, if she amuses him, but once he stoops to the common people it is time for his poor mother to get busy.

CARDINAL. And your plan is—

QUEEN-MOTHER. Utterly simple. I have made inquiries, and discovered that Denise and her father take a walk each evening in the Garden of the Winged Cupid—[*moving up to the window R. of the CARDINAL*] you can see it from here. You will go to them presently, present my compliments, and say the Queen's cook has made a dish of the famous lemon-cheese tarts, and the Queen-mother herself bids them come and taste them with her. Once here, you will, of course, offer the cakes to me, and then, in deference to the Church, I shall offer them to you. Those will be the two untouched ones at the bottom of the letter, you understand. After that, they can fall to in good earnest, and may they come with an excellent appetite. [*Laughing heartily, crossing to R. of table, and picking up the cakes*] You know, there is something distinctly humorous about it.

[*She regards the cakes.*]

CARDINAL [*moving to the R.C.*]. Humorous? It's excruciating! Ha! Ha! [*Suddenly growing serious*] Of course, there is no doubt that these two particular cakes are perfectly safe? It's not myself I'm thinking of, but the Church needs me, and—

QUEEN-MOTHER [*putting the cakes down on the table again*]. The Church does not need you more than I do. Rest assured, my lord, you are perfectly safe unless and until we reconsider your position.

CARDINAL [*uncomfortably*]. Oh, quite—yes—thank you very much indeed.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Now to work! No one can ever say I have shirked work, especially work of this kind! It is nearly five; you must go to the Garden of the Winged Cupid and carry out your mission. Bring them as soon as—

[*The door R. suddenly opens, and the KING enters.*]
Really, Charles, I told you not to come and see me this evening!

KING [*crossing to the QUEEN-MOTHER*]. All the more reason why I should come and give you a surprise, darling. [*They kiss.*] No one likes you to be left alone

too much. It's not safe. Hullo, Cardinal! I wish I could wear clothes like you. [*Moving to below table*] I say, what delicious cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Charles, leave those cakes alone!

KING. But I love 'em. It's one of the few innocent tastes I've inherited from you.

QUEEN-MOTHER. You know perfectly well you've inherited nothing from me, more's the pity. You're exactly like your poor father.

KING. Extraordinary man, my poor father, but at least he was fond of animals, just as I am. By the way, what did he die of?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*turning away*]. You're always asking silly questions!

KING. I notice that one always annoys you. So glad.
[*He moves to L. of table.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. Glad? It's nothing to be glad about—annoying your poor old mother.

KING [*sitting*]. Good heavens! Why this pathetic touch? What's in the wind?

CARDINAL [*interposing*]. Her Majesty is a little tired with affairs of State. Would it not be better to retire and leave her alone with her own sad thoughts?

KING. Not at all. I'm tired and also hungry, and as for thoughts, there's nothing like food for the dumps.

[*He stretches out his hands to the cakes.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. Charles, leave those cakes alone!

CARDINAL [*to the KING*]. Your Majesty, I am sure there are plenty more in the palace.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Of course there are. I know the cook made two dozen when she made these. Besides, you've no need to be hungry. Your pockets are bulging with food as it is.

KING. They're not!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Well, what is in them, then?

KING. Why do you want to know?

QUEEN-MOTHER [*coming to below table*]. Charles, it's understood you have no secrets from me.

KING. Oh, haven't I? You ask the Duchess de Briancourt.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Don't be vulgar. What is in those pockets?

KING. Only animals.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Animals? What kind of animals?

KING. Well, this one [*slapping right-hand pocket*] contains a baby hedgehog, but it's dead.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Disgusting!

KING. Not at all. At least it died naturally, which is more than your circle seem to manage.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*moving up to the window*]. Charles!

CARDINAL [*tactfully*]. And the other pocket, your Majesty?

KING. There's a rabbit in that. It's alive.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*coming back to the table again*]. Alive? Good gracious! Who ever heard of a king walking about with a live rabbit in his pocket?

KING [*pulling rabbit out of his pocket*]. Well, that's just what a king has done. And it's a very nice rabbit. It's going to sleep with me to-night.

QUEEN-MOTHER. It is *not*!

KING. It is!

QUEEN-MOTHER. I say no.

[*Somewhere a large clock strikes five.*]
Go, my Lord Cardinal, on your errand of State. I will deal with this tiresome boy.

[*The CARDINAL bows and exits R.*]

KING. Where's that old boy off to?

QUEEN-MOTHER. You're not to ask impertinent questions. And you are certainly not having a rabbit to sleep with you to-night. The idea is absurd and irreverent.

KING. Why is it irreverent?

QUEEN-MOTHER. I don't know why, but it obviously is. [*She walks up to the window.*] Take that rabbit out of your pocket, and I will give it to a servant to be destroyed.

KING. Certainly not! Why on earth should it be destroyed? It might easily be most useful.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*looking eagerly out of window*]. Nonsense! How can a rabbit be useful?

KING. You never know. Anyway, it shall not be destroyed.

QUEEN-MOTHER. I say it shall. Ah, there they are!

KING [*rising*]. Who?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Will you cease asking questions? Ring the bell for the servant to take away your rabbit.

KING. No! No!

[*He slips over to the door R., opens it softly, and tips out the rabbit.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. I say, yes, yes!

KING [*crossing back to the table*]. And I say, tut, tut! [*Observing the dish of cakes*] Why are these cakes arranged in a letter M? [*He picks up the dish.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. Compliment to me, of course. What a time that Cardinal is!

KING [*sitting on the table and taking a cake from the bottom of the M*]. The legs of the M are too long.

[*He gulps the cake.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. Nonsense!

KING [*taking a cake from the other side*]. They are, by two cakes.

[*He gulps the second cake, and puts the dish down, then jumps from the table and moves down L.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER [*hearing this*]. Charles, leave those cakes alone and give me the rabbit.

[*She comes from the window and rings the bell.*]

[*The SERVANT enters R.*]

SERVANT. Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. The King has a rabbit that he——

KING. No, he hasn't.

QUEEN-MOTHER. What do you mean?

KING [*showing his empty pocket*]. Well, I ask you, has he? And now the man has come I'll have all those cakes. He can easily bring some more.

[*He is about to take them.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER. Charles! Leave those—— [*To the SERVANT*] Take them away at once and watch over them. [*She hands the dish to the SERVANT, who exits R.* You silly boy, you will drive me distracted!

KING [*crossing to the chair down R. and sitting on the up-stage arm*]. You're a beastly spoil-sport! Who are those cakes for?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Where is that rabbit?

KING. Shan't tell you unless you tell me who the cakes are for.

QUEEN-MOTHER. They're for the Lord Prince Cardinal and myself to make merry on.

KING. When you and the Cardinal make merry wise men run for their lives.

QUEEN-MOTHER. No doubt, but I've answered your question. Where is that rabbit?

KING. I put it outside when you weren't looking.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Do you mean to say it's lopping about the corridors now? Good heavens, how unseemly in a royal palace.

[*She rings the bell.*
[*The SERVANT enters R.*

Have you seen the rabbit?

SERVANT [*astonished*]. The rabbit, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Yes, the rabbit, you silly loon! Have you seen the rabbit out there?

SERVANT. The rabbit, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Oh, why are we afflicted with the lower classes? Have you seen the King's rabbit?

SERVANT. Does your Majesty mean the Duchess de Briancourt?

[*The KING laughs heartily.*

QUEEN-MOTHER. No, of course not! There's nothing to laugh at, Charles. The King has lost a rabbit in the corridor outside. Is that clear?

KING [*rising*]. A fat brown one with an extraordinary appetite. Is that clear?

SERVANT. Yes, I think so, your Majesties.

KING

QUEEN-MOTHER } [*together*]. Have you seen it?

SERVANT. No, your Majesties. I have seen no rabbit—as yet.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Well, why didn't you say so before?

SERVANT. I was too astonished, your Majesty.

QUEEN-MOTHER. You've no business to be astonished.

KING. Don't be silly; every one is astonished by rabbits.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Why?

KING. I don't know, but they always are. You were yourself.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*going to window up C.*]. Anyway, it doesn't matter very much.

KING. But of course it does. I love my animals. I'm sorry I let this one go, but it seemed the only way of saving it. And unless you give orders for this man to find it I'm going to remain here all night.

[*He sits in the chair down R.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER [*after a glance out of the window*]. As a matter of fact, it is urgently necessary for you to go at once.

KING. No!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Charles!

KING. No! Not until you find my rabbit.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*to SERVANT*]. The King will go with you and search for the rabbit.

SERVANT. And leave the cakes outside, your Majesty?

KING. Ah, yes, those cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER [*moving to R. C., clasping her hands*]. Good heavens, yes! The cakes! [*To SERVANT*] Go back and guard them at once. [*The SERVANT exits R.*]

KING. While I remain here.

QUEEN-MOTHER. You idiotic boy! I have never been so contradicted in one day before. You must go and find your stupid rabbit by yourself. Goodness knows where it may have wandered by now, and we have enough scandals in the Court already. And, remember, the Queen-mother is mistress of this palace and of all within it. [*She points majestically to the small door L.*]

KING. The rabbit didn't go that way.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*talking the KING by the ear and leading him across L.*]. No, but the King will. Work your way round to the other door gradually, and heaven grant you meet the rabbit on your journey!

[*She turns to meet her visitors. The KING unwillingly opens the door, then, seeing his mother is not noticing, shuts it and, running back, hides under the table. The SERVANT shows in DENISE DE BEAUJOLIS, her father, and the CARDINAL, then exits R. again.*

[C.] Ah, my Lord Cardinal, you have returned, and with your company. Welcome, Denise and Monsieur de Beaujolais, welcome! It is more than time you graced our apartment.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*in a shrill, piping voice*]. Honoured, your Majesty, honoured, I'm sure. As I was saying to the Cardinal as we came along, though we're by no means unused to select society and I hope we know how to behave, my girl and I, still, it makes you jump to be summoned bang into the palace, all in a jiffy, so to speak, and before——

DENISE. Be quiet, Father. Your Majesty, we're just overwhelmed. I never thought you'd play the handsome like this.

QUEEN-MOTHER. It is a pleasure I've long promised myself. Come, be seated.

[*The QUEEN-MOTHER sits above the large table L. DENISE and M. DE BEAUJOLIS sit at the small table R., DENISE up stage.*

Seldom does a poor Queen have time to rejoice and make merry, but my Lord Cardinal, finding us in sombre mood, thought your sweet grace and winning ways—of which we have heard much—might somewhat cheer us.

CARDINAL [*bowing to the guests*]. Beauty and wisdom are ever the solace of royalty.

[*He sits in the chair below the door R.*

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. As I was saying as we came along, my girl can beat the noblest lady, in the land when it comes to looks, while as for wisdom, I can tell you, my

lord, if you'd been in some of the tight corners I've been in you'd have shivered in your scarlet shoes. You know, your Majesty, women have always played the very devil with me; they're so damned——

DENISE. Now, Father! Your Majesty, what an apartment! Just fancy living here! I must say I like a bit of taste. Charles always says you do yourself well.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Does he indeed? Very good of him, I'm sure. You see somewhat of my son?

DENISE. Somewhat? Hullo, that's good! Charles and I are—well, the best of friends, you know.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. That's the way to put it. Tactful, tactful. And as your Majesty well knows, one can't be too tactful, because women are so damned——

DENISE. Be quiet, Father! You know, your Majesty, I first met the King during a dog-fight in the palace gardens. He came upon it quite unofficially, you know, and tried to separate them. Oh, how I laughed! I was all doubled up, and the King, seeing that, of course, sent away his gentlemen, and—well, that was the beginning of a great many things.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Sweet child. I'm sure it must have been. We also must be good friends, you and I.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. There! What did I say? I knew the Queen would take to her at once; they're so much alike. Not that we were really uneasy, your Majesty, because we feel we know you very well already, as Charles always gives us the latest tit-bits from the palace, and we laugh fit to kill ourselves when we hear of the Cardinal and all those *damned*——

CARDINAL. Some other time, Monsieur de Beaujolis, I beg!

QUEEN-MOTHER. It is all very interesting, but you must be tired and need refreshment. Possibly you have heard of my cook's lemon-cheese cakes?

DENISE. Haven't we just! The King is always licking his lips over them.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. They rejuvenate the mouth,

invigorate the stomach, and impart the spices of Araby to the breath.

QUEEN-MOTHER. How well you put it! My cook has just made a fresh batch; you must taste them without delay. *[She rises and strikes the bell.]*

[The SERVANT enters R.]

Bring in the cakes.

[The SERVANT exits R.]

M. DE BEAUJOLIS *[digging DENISE in the ribs]*. We are getting on well, aren't we?

DENISE. We should do if you'd behave better.

[The SERVANT enters R. with the cakes, crosses, and lays them on the table before the QUEEN-MOTHER.]

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Go on! Behave yourself!

DENISE. Don't be silly. Once a lady always a lady. *[She slaps him.]*

[Meanwhile the SERVANT has retired, and he now brings in the wine. He places two goblets on the large table L., and two on the small table R.]

QUEEN-MOTHER *[crossing to DENISE and stroking her head]*. Pretty creature! Your playful ways delight my heart. I can see that Charles has excellent taste.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Taste? The King never makes a mistake when it comes to women. Just like his father! I always remember the old King saying—in public too, mark you—that the damnedest—

[The CARDINAL rises.]

CARDINAL. Will not your Majesty commence the feast?

QUEEN-MOTHER *[crossing back to her seat above the table R. and sitting]*. With pleasure, my Lord Cardinal. Come, let us be madly gay! *[She throws herself back and laughs a hollow laugh.]* Ha! Ha!

CARDINAL *[echoing]*. Ha! Ha!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS *[laughing lustily]*. He! He! He! I do like a bit of fun, I do!

QUEEN-MOTHER. I hope you get it. *[To DENISE, lifting*

the dish of cakes] Do you observe how prettily these cakes are arranged ?

DENISE. The letter M, upon my word !

CARDINAL. The Queen's initial. A compliment of the cook.

DENISE. Well, they do things in style here, I must say. I wish poor old Charles could see *me* eating cakes with you ; he'd never believe his eyes.

QUEEN-MOTHER. I trust the King is occupied elsewhere. Come, my lord, will you serve us ?

CARDINAL [*crossing to L. of QUEEN-MOTHER*]. Most willingly, madam. [*He hands the dish of cakes to her.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER [*taking a cake and handing the dish back to him*]. Let no monarch forget to reverence the Church.

CARDINAL [*bowing and taking a cake*]. Madam, the Church is deeply honoured.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*rising and taking the dish to the DE BEAUJOLIS*]. Now, pray help yourselves and help again, for they are as nourishing as they are delicious.

CARDINAL [*lifting a goblet from the table*]. A toast ! To the great Queen-mother ! Success to her plans and destruction to her enemies !

THE DE BEAUJOLIS [*getting up, raising their goblets, and drinking*]. The great Queen-mother ! Success to her plans and destruction to her enemies !

[*They sit down again.*]

[*The CARDINAL sits in the chair L. of the table.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER [*to DENISE*]. How are you feeling ?

DENISE [*a little astonished*]. Perfectly well, I thank you, your Majesty.

QUEEN-MOTHER. Have one more, I beg of you. [*Moving round to behind M. DE BEAUJOLIS*] You are still in perfect health, I suppose ?

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Never better in my life, your Majesty.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*handing him the dish*]. You must really have another.

[*He takes one. There is a slight pause.*]

[*C.*, observing him] Wonderful!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. What is wonderful, if I may ask, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Your constitutions.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Oh, we're a tough family, I can tell you. And it's a good job I am tough, because, as the Cardinal very well knows, women are so——

QUEEN-MOTHER. And you, child, are perfectly marvellous. Is it fresh air or natural resistance?

DENISE. What on earth do you mean, your Majesty?

QUEEN-MOTHER. I think I can safely tell you—indeed, I suppose you have every right to know—that if your constitutions had any sense of decency you ought to be dying by now.

THE DE BEAUJOLIS [*rising*]. Ought to be dying by now?

QUEEN-MOTHER. Certainly; and the fact that you're not is the finest example of lower-class tenacity I have ever seen.

DENISE [*howling*]. Oh! Oh! Caught like rats! Just like rats! [*To M. DE BEAUJOLIS*] You old imbecile! You ought to have known!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Of course he ought, but old imbeciles never do. Why are you so astonished? Did you suppose I would let this disgraceful affair between you and Charles continue? You may lay traps for my idiotic son, but I can lay traps as well, and with the assistance of my good cardinal will soon rid the country of a couple of pests.

DENISE. I can't believe it! I won't believe it!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Oh, it can't possibly be true!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Since they find it so difficult to believe you'd better explain, my lord.

CARDINAL [*rising, affably*]. Like all great projects, it is beautifully simple. The Queen-mother, with her accustomed skill, poisoned all the tarts of the letter M with the exception of the two at the bottom, which——

KING [*suddenly rising between them from under the table*].—which I ate when Mother wasn't looking!

[*A terrible pause.*]

QUEEN-MOTHER [*recovering*]. Charles, where did you come from?

KING. Under the table, and it's true what I said about the tarts.

QUEEN-MOTHER. But when did you eat them?

KING. When you were looking out of the window.

CARDINAL. But those two were intended for the Queen-mother and myself.

KING. Precisely. Well, you took the two next. [*To the QUEEN-MOTHER*] I told you the legs of the M were too long.

CARDINAL. But, good heavens, that means that we're all——

ALL. Poisoned!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. It's a have, that's what it is, a beastly have!

DENISE. Poisoned! After all my pains to catch the King! After all the planning and plotting! Oh, it can't be true! [*Crossing to the KING*] Have I put up with your silly jokes and tiresome animals, wasted my money on complexion doctors, and dressed far above my means for it all to be spoilt by a horrible old cat who has already poisoned half Europe, including her husband!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. I must say Denise is right. Why, I could have spent years peacefully thieving like my father before me if I hadn't tried to get this worthless chit fixed up in the palace. It's a shame, that's what it is, a beastly shame! A clever man like myself all done to nothing because a king has slobbered over a hussy!

CARDINAL [*crossing to above table R.*]. I must say this is a shock. A shock! I can scarcely realize it. It ought not to have happened; at least, not to a prince of the Church; and I don't mind saying I was ill prepared, very ill prepared indeed. I may have looked the part,

and, of course, I was very careful not to take too many vows and all that kind of nonsense; still, you know, there were all manner of little things not exactly in tone, perhaps, and I don't mind saying it now. There's been quite a lot of going on in my life, really. Why, only yesterday——

QUEEN-MOTHER. My Lord Cardinal, you have no need to enliven our last moments by boasting. It does not surprise me to hear that your past is the colour of your robe, or that the woman is heartless, or the father a thief, but the appalling foolishness of my preposterous son has never ceased to amaze me, and I shall die in a state of stupefied astonishment at his never-ending idiocy.

KING [*going to the QUEEN-MOTHER up C.*]. What's the good of cursing me? I'm as astonished as anybody.

M. DE BEAUJOLIS [*to DENISE*]. To think of all the trouble I took to pass you off as my daughter!

KING. Oh, then, she isn't your daughter?

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. What do you think? I picked her up in the gutter.

DENISE [*to the KING*]. To think of all the trouble I took to make you think I adored you!

KING. Oh, then, you don't adore me?

DENISE. How could I? [*Turning down L.*] A fool like you!

KING. Well, this is a pretty end to an idyllic love-affair.

CARDINAL. A pretty end to years of triumphant compromise!

M. DE BEAUJOLIS.—of comfortable knavery!

DENISE.—of delicious amours!

QUEEN-MOTHER. Silence! It has happened, and through an idiot. All my life I have noticed that there is an idiot at the bottom of every important event. But at least we know each other fairly well by now, so, while our constitutions still resist the drug, let us shake hands and prepare for a swift journey.

CARDINAL. Nevertheless, I think I ought to say that I've been rather——

QUEEN-MOTHER. Cardinal, you are incorrigible!

[They begin to shake hands.]

KING *[crossing to down R., taking out a handkerchief, and sitting]*. Used as I am to Court life, this is beginning to affect me.

[The QUEEN-MOTHER has shaken hands with the CARDINAL and M. DE BEAUJOLIS, and is just approaching DENISE when a great bang is heard. All jump.]

M. DE BEAUJOLIS. Now does that mean we've reached heaven or the other place? *[The SERVANT rushes in.]*

SERVANT *[falling on his knees]*. Oh, your Majesty, the King's rabbit!

QUEEN-MOTHER *[folding her arms and staring nobly into space]*. Fool, we have passed beyond a king's rabbit!

CARDINAL	} <i>[folding their arms and staring into space]</i> . Passed beyond a king's
DENISE	
M. DE BEAUJOLIS	

rabbit.

SERVANT. But your Majesty, a great calamity has happened!

QUEEN-MOTHER *[as before]*. Calamities mean nothing to us now.

CARDINAL	} <i>[as before]</i> . Nothing to us now.
DENISE	
M. DE BEAUJOLIS	

SERVANT. But the King will be furious!

QUEEN-MOTHER *[as before]*. A king's fury is beneath us.

CARDINAL	} <i>[as before]</i> . Quite beneath us.
DENISE	
M. DE BEAUJOLIS	

KING *[rising, going to SERVANT, and shaking him]*. Fool! What has happened?

SERVANT. Sire, your rabbit has exploded. It ate up the cheese-cakes!

QUEEN-MOTHER

CARDINAL

DENISE

M. DE BEAUJOLIS

} [*coming out of their trance*]. The
} cheese-cakes ?

SERVANT. Oh, pardon, your Majesties ! When I returned to the cakes after your Majesty had called me I found the rabbit eating the last one, and in consequence it has gone and exploded. The cook will take it as a personal insult.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*stepping down C.*]. But you brought the cakes back here !

SERVANT. I flew to get some more from the cook, and we arranged them as before. We thought all would be well.

QUEEN-MOTHER [*looking at the others*]. All would be well !

KING. I told you that rabbit would be useful. So glad !

QUICK CURTAIN

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

A COMEDY

By ASHLEY DUKES

CHARACTERS

ALDERMAN JOHN GROAT, *a City haberdasher*

MISTRESS ANN GROAT, *his young wife*

MASTER QUILL, *an attorney*

MASTER JULEP, *a physician*

MASTER SUNDER, *a surgeon*

MASTER OUNCE, *an apothecary*

A MANSERVANT

A WAITING-WOMAN

The SHOWMAN is played by MASTER SUNDER.

The scene is the alderman's house in Cheapside, London, in the Middle Ages. The costumes should be of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. A curtained scene with two openings may be used if desired. Playing time, 1½ hours.

THERE are dramatic critics who can analyse other people's plays, but lack the constructive imagination and craftsmanship necessary for creating plays of their own. Mr Ashley Dukes belongs to the other class of critics who can achieve as successfully as they can appraise. He was a dramatic critic for various papers both before and after the Great War ; he has written four or five excellent volumes like *Modern Dramatists* and *The Youngest Drama* ; he has translated or adapted plays from the German and French—"The Machine Wreckers," "Elizabeth of England," "No Man's Land," and "Mozart," for example ; and he has written original plays like "The Fountain Head" and "The Man with a Load of Mischief," the latter of which earned for the author a great popular success. "The Dumb Wife of Cheap-side" is a brilliant dramatization of an amusing story from Rabelais.

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE¹

A SHOWMAN dressed in the cap and robe of a mediæval doctor comes before the curtain and beats his drum, as though to gather sightseers at a fair.

SHOWMAN. Good masters and mistresses, come into our playhouse, and you shall see us act, for our profit and your pleasure, a most moral comedy called *The Dumb Wife of Cheapside*. Nay, it is a most ancient comedy too, having been acted above fifty thousand times since the beginning of the world, and written down a score of times at least : and such comedies, like wines and cheeses, are the better for their age. Our tale is drawn from Master Francis Rabelais, his *Pantagruel*, chapter the thirty-fourth, where you may read it if you will ; but we being players would have you see it instead.

[He beats his drum.

Here in my hand is a bill of the characters, which I will read, and that is all you shall know of the comedy until we take your pence. They are Alderman John Groat, a haberdasher of Cheapside ; and Mistress Ann Groat, his newly wedded wife ; and Master Quill, his attorney ; and Master Julep, a learned physician ; and Master Sunder, a surgeon—nay, a very skilful surgeon, since I shall presently play him myself ; and Master Ounce, a most precise apothecary ; and servants in the Alderman's house, which is our scene. And further we warrant and certify these characters to be imaginary, like the matter of the play ; so let no person so named proceed against us for slander under peril of being called a greater fool than our Alderman. And now to begin, good mistresses and masters !

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

[*He withdraws behind the curtain, which presently opens. The scene is the hall of the Alderman's house. To the actor's R., in the background, is the entrance from the street, and to the L. a door leading to the living-rooms. The only furniture consists of an oaken table, around which are placed three chairs. On the table C. are a flask of wine and pewter cups, and to L. of them an ink-horn. Beneath the table a stool. The scene is empty when the curtain rises. A knock is heard at the street-door. A MANSERVANT enters L., crosses over, and opens it, admitting MASTER QUILL, who pauses for an instant on the threshold, and then enters briskly.*

MASTER QUILL [*coming R.C.*]. Your master is awaiting me.

MANSERVANT [*at door R.*]. Sir, whom shall I announce to his Worship?

MASTER QUILL [*with dignity*]. Young man, you have not been long in his service, or you would know that I am Master Quill, his attorney, of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

MANSERVANT. I ask pardon, sir. [*Crosses to L.C.*] His Worship shall know that you are here.

MASTER QUILL [*recalling him with a gesture*]. Stay. Is your mistress at home?

MANSERVANT. She is gone with her waiting-woman to the cloth fair on Smithfield.

MASTER QUILL. True, it is the feast of Saint Bartholomew. And has your mistress—is your mistress— It is no matter, young man; you may go.

MANSERVANT. My master will be with your Honour directly. [*Exit L.*]

MASTER QUILL [*alone R.C.*]. Now, what can the Alderman want with me? I was amazed to hear of his wedding. A snug haberdasher of Cheapside, turned forty, away he goes for a jaunt in Surrey, and returns home married, if you please! Married—without so much as a 'By your leave' to his attorney! I vow no

good can come of it. [*He comes to the table, sniffs at the flask of wine, and seats himself R. of table.*] She has a pretty face, doubtless—but no money, from all I hear. That is bad. Money should marry money: 'tis a law of life. And she is young, they say. That is none too good: forty should marry thirty, to my thinking. I fear for honest John Groat.

[*Enter the ALDERMAN L. QUILL rises.* Ahem! Good morning to your Worship.

ALDERMAN [*as though preoccupied*]. Ah, it is you, Master Quill? Pray be seated.

[*MASTER QUILL sits R. of table.* MASTER QUILL. I trust your Worship is well?

ALDERMAN. My health could not be better, Master Quill. [*He seats himself L. of table.*] No doubt you have heard of my marriage?

MASTER QUILL. The news reached me but yesterday, so that I am of the first to wish you joy.

ALDERMAN. I thank you, Master Quill, I thank you. Now you will guess that I wish to make a settlement upon my bride.

MASTER QUILL [*taking out his writing-tablet*]. I shall be happy to receive your Worship's commands. To such a man as you, Master Groat, I need not counsel prudence, prudence. . . .

ALDERMAN. I wish to settle upon my wife, Ann Groat, the whole of the property I now possess.

MASTER QUILL. The whole of your property! But, my good sir, that is a will and not a marriage-gift!

ALDERMAN. It is my will.

[*MASTER QUILL makes a gesture of protest.* Nay, you need not try to dissuade me. I know my mind, Master Quill.

MASTER QUILL. You are a man in the prime of life, with a thriving trade that may need money for its growth. Pray reflect before entrusting your fortune to a woman's hands, however dear she may be to you. Consider too the effect upon your wife's good name.

The City matrons will certainly be envious. They will say she has talked you into an act of folly.

ALDERMAN. Ah, would that were possible! Master Quill, I must tell you that my wife is dumb.

MASTER QUILL [*rising, in astonishment*]. Your wife is dumb?

ALDERMAN. Unhappily she has been dumb from her birth.

MASTER QUILL. Do I hear you aright?

ALDERMAN. Alas, it is too true!

MASTER QUILL. But how, then, could you marry her?

ALDERMAN. She was able to signify her assent.

MASTER QUILL. By what means?

ALDERMAN. She embraced me warmly, even before my declaration was ended.

MASTER QUILL [*sits as before*]. Then it appears she is not deaf?

ALDERMAN. Her hearing is good enough; nay, it is better than yours or mine. This morning I had no sooner remarked that it was a fine day and the feast of Saint Bartholomew than she took the purse from my hand and ran with her waiting-woman to the fair on Smithfield.

MASTER QUILL. And this is the wife to whom you would make over your fortune!

ALDERMAN. I love her, Master Quill, and I wish to give her proof of my trust. Poor child, I know she will not easily hold her own among the gossips of Cheap-side. They shall have reason to envy my treasure!

MASTER QUILL. I am amazed by such rashness.

ALDERMAN. Wait, Master Quill. I have another reason for this marriage-gift, and one that you may think more prudent.

MASTER QUILL. Indeed, I hope so.

ALDERMAN. Let me be sure we are not overheard. [*He rises, goes to the door L., listens, and returns to L. of table.*] I hear it rumoured, Master Quill, that a new tax is shortly to be levied upon heads of families, accord-

ing to their means. Is not that sheer robbery of bread-winners and thrifty citizens like myself?

MASTER QUILL. We none of us like taxation, Master Groat, and yet we must endure it.

ALDERMAN. Nay, hear me out. [*He sits L. of table.*] I settle all I possess upon my wife, who will be dumb to the Treasury's questionings. As for myself I am as good as penniless; let them tax me as they please. Now what do you say to my plan?

MASTER QUILL. You have missed your calling, Master Groat; you should have been a lawyer and not a haberdasher. But what if your wife should prove a spendthrift!

ALDERMAN. My goods are what women chiefly run to buy. In my warehouse are silks and ribbons enough to bedeck all the dumb ladies in Christendom. If my wife should spend too freely the money will come over my own counter.

MASTER QUILL. Nay, I foresee that you may even grow rich again, thanks to this handsome provision you are making for her. [*He rises.*] Yes, I will draw up the deed of settlement you wish.

ALDERMAN. Very good, Master Quill. [*He rises, goes behind the table, and pours out wine.*] Now, pray take a cup of wine with me, and let us speak as friends. You must not think me indifferent to my wife's affliction. I confess that it troubles me deeply.

MASTER QUILL [*taking the cup of wine that is handed to him*]. It is true a dumb wife must be poor company for a man of spirit like yourself.

ALDERMAN. There are times when I can scarcely bear to look into her eyes. [*He returns to L. of table, and motions QUILL to be seated on the R., as before.*] She would speak if she could, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL. I am sure of it.

ALDERMAN. Nay, she would utter the prettiest, the tenderest, the most loving, of thoughts!

MASTER QUILL. Hum! Of that one can never be so sure.

ALDERMAN. Do you doubt my word ?

MASTER QUILL. I see that you are a newly wedded husband, Master Groat, and I drink your very good health. [*He raises his cup, and they drink to each other.*] But if you know her so well, why should her dumbness distress you so deeply ?

ALDERMAN [*setting down his cup*]. I long to hear of her happiness from her own lips. Nay, I will tell you that to fondle a dumb wife is no joy at all, such is the pain of longing for her speech.

MASTER QUILL. These are strange fancies. You should remember that the oracles of the ancients were mostly dumb, and that was their virtue.

ALDERMAN. I am a plain man, Master Quill, and I know that her dumbness stands between us. Only yesterday, as we walked in Cheapside, an impudent apprentice looked into her face and smiled. Could she tell me of her loathing for that fellow's base effrontery ? No, Master Quill ! I held her closer and hurried her homeward, while she looked upon me with so pitiful a gaze that my eyes filled with tears. Ah, Master Quill, I am the happiest of men in possessing such a treasure, and the wretchedest in being parted from her by this misfortune !

MASTER QUILL. Since we speak as friends, Master Groat, let me tell you that you are a man of sense in trade, but a simpleton in having married a dumb wife. Yet as one husband to another, I grant that your state has some advantages. [*Rising and coming C.*] Now I will take my leave, since to-day I shall be unable to pay my respects to Mistress Groat.

ALDERMAN [*rising*]. Pray do not go, Master Quill ! She may return at any moment. I hear her step already. She is here, Master Quill, she is here ! [*He crosses R.*] Let me but open the door !

MASTER QUILL [*crossing over L., and shaking his head.*] Ah, Master Groat, I said that you were a newly wedded husband !

[The ALDERMAN, opening the door R., reveals the young and beautiful ANN standing on the threshold. She enters, followed by her WAITING-WOMAN, who carries her fairings. The WAITING-WOMAN comes down stage R., while ANN advances slowly to the C., regarding MASTER QUILL.

ALDERMAN [bustling beside her]. My dearest Ann, this is Master Quill, the attorney, who has come to pay his respects to you. Master Quill, I present you to my bride.

MASTER QUILL [coming to her]. Mistress Ann, I kiss your hand. Nay, I see the rumour of your beauty is less than the truth.

[ANN slowly turns her head to her WAITING-WOMAN, as though requiring her to interpret.

WAITING-WOMAN [with a curtsy to MASTER QUILL]. My mistress desires me to thank you kindly, sir.

ALDERMAN. You see, Master Quill, by what make-shifts we must converse! [To ANN] But, my love, what is this look in your eyes? What has befallen you? Was there some riot in the fair? Ah, why was I not there to guard you, my treasure?

MASTER QUILL. Come, Master Groat, you see your lady before you safe and sound!

ALDERMAN. No, she is trembling; she is pale! Ann, my dove, my darling, why can you not speak to me? Why can you not speak?

[He brings a chair in front of the table C., and seats ANN in it. A silence. ANN turns again to her WAITING-WOMAN, as though bidding her speak.

WAITING-WOMAN. It was but a trifle, sir. My mistress wishes you to think no more of it.

ALDERMAN. What, is her own husband not to know what has befallen her? Tell me, woman!

WAITING-WOMAN. Your pardon, sir. It was but the learned doctor whom we saw at the fair——

ALDERMAN [*standing beside ANN*]. What learned doctor?

WAITING-WOMAN. He who loosens the tongues of the dumb, to make them speak.

ALDERMAN. Can there be such a man? [*He turns to MASTER QUILL.*] Tell me, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL. It is true this physician is well known. His name is Master Julep, and he sets up his booth at every London fair. With him is a surgeon-barber, Master Sunder, who is skilled in the art of severing the tongue-strings of mutes. I have seen them perform this operation before a crowd as an advertisement of their craft.

ALDERMAN. You have seen it with your own eyes?
[*He crosses to MASTER QUILL L.*]

WAITING-WOMAN [*crossing to ALDERMAN's place beside ANN*]. Aye, and we would have seen it too, but my poor mistress stood all a-tremble, and I feared she would swoon away!

ALDERMAN [*turning on her*]. Be silent, woman! [*To MASTER QUILL*] Now Master Quill—upon whom was this miracle performed?

MASTER QUILL. Upon a maid, if I remember aright. She was seated in a chair, when a draught was first administered to her by the apothecary, Master Ounce.

WAITING-WOMAN. Aye, that was the short gentleman's name!

ALDERMAN [*turning on her*]. Be silent, I say! [*To MASTER QUILL, as before*] Proceed, Master Quill, proceed.

[*The WAITING-WOMAN retires down stage R.*]

MASTER QUILL. Then Master Sunder, the surgeon, taking an instrument that resembled a common pair of shears—But let me not alarm your good lady, who is certainly pale—

ALDERMAN [*eagerly*]. It is no matter. Proceed!

MASTER QUILL. Taking this instrument, I say, he declared in a loud voice that he would loosen her

tongue, and he addressed himself to the task, which was accomplished in a twinkling.

ALDERMAN. And did the maid speak ?

MASTER QUILL. Yes, indeed. I will not swear that she was dumb before, but she spoke afterwards.

ALDERMAN. Fluently ?

MASTER QUILL. Copiously.

ALDERMAN [*returning to C. of stage*]. Ah, Master Quill, why did you not tell me sooner of this famous doctor ?

MASTER QUILL. You have but this morning told me of your lady's dumbness. And as your attorney I must counsel prudence——

ALDERMAN. Prudence—with my poor wife awaiting deliverance from her infirmity !

MASTER QUILL. If she has been dumb from birth I do not see the urgency of the matter.

ALDERMAN [*between MASTER QUILL and ANN*]. You are heartless, Master Quill ! Only look at her now ! See the mournful eyes she turns upon us as we speak ! Do they not reproach us ? Does she not cry out for the gift of speech ? Consider her youth, her loveliness ! Nay, touch her if you will, and assure yourself that she is a woman and no image in female shape !

MASTER QUILL. Since you have married her I will accept your testimony on that point.

ALDERMAN. My dear Ann, my heart's delight, would you not rejoice to speak ? Do not your lips burn to tell your husband of your love for him ? See, Master Quill, how she answers me ! Was ever so joyful a movement seen in any woman ? Could her tongue be loosened at this moment I vow we should hear the chant of the seraphim, no less ! This doctor shall be summoned immediately ! Where is my manservant ? Matthew, Matthew ! [*The MANSERVANT enters L.*]

MANSERVANT. I am here, your Worship.

ALDERMAN. Run swiftly to the fair on Smithfield, and fetch me the famous physician, Master Julep, and his surgeon, Master Sunder ! Why do you linger here ?

MANSERVANT. How shall I know them, your Worship ?

ALDERMAN. Master Quill will tell you.

MASTER QUILL. Master Sunder is known by his voice. Indeed, I wonder we do not hear him at this distance from the field.

ALDERMAN. Bring them instantly ! Say that Master Groat, the Alderman, requires their services ! Promise them that I will pay them well !

MANSERVANT. I go, your Worship !

[*The MANSERVANT runs out R.*]

ALDERMAN. Ah, what happiness is mine ! Ann, dearest Ann, I have endowed you already with my worldly goods. Master Quill is here to draw up the settlement of my estate upon you.

MASTER QUILL. Ahem ! I think you should now reflect upon the wisdom of that course.

ALDERMAN. No, my fortune shall be hers ! [*To ANN*] Does not that overjoy you, my darling ?

[*ANN turns slowly to the WAITING-WOMAN, as before.*]

WAITING-WOMAN. My mistress offers her thanks to your Worship.

ALDERMAN [*standing by ANN and holding her hand*]. But now I have a greater gift in store for both of us. You shall speak, my love, you shall speak ! No longer must I scan your face to read the thoughts you hide from me—alas, so unwillingly !

MASTER QUILL [*coming towards C.*]. One word with you, Master Groat. If you are bent upon this undertaking it is not for me to dissuade you from it.

ALDERMAN. No, Master Quill, you need not waste your breath !

MASTER QUILL. But I must warn you that by the common law the patient's consent must be given to every surgical operation.

ALDERMAN [*to ANN*]. I have it, my love, have I not ? [*To MASTER QUILL*] See how gladly she nods and smiles to me ! I have it, Master Quill !

MASTER QUILL. Nay, she must deliver it in writing.

ALDERMAN. A plague upon the lawyers! [*He sits L. of table.*] What shall I write for her?

MASTER QUILL. Ahem! [*Pacing up and down L.*] Write, Master Groat: "I, Ann Groat, married woman, being of sound mind, do hereby solemnly declare that I consent to the loosening of my tongue——"

ALDERMAN [*writing*]. "—of my tongue——"

MASTER QUILL. "—by such degree of skill as is commonly used by surgeons; and I further declare that I indemnify my husband, John Groat——"

ALDERMAN. That goes without saying, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL. Nothing in the law goes without saying. Write, if you please: "—my husband, John Groat, and his attorney, Oliver Quill, here present, against all consequences of the said operation, whether they be pain, blood-letting, distemper, death, or any other inconvenience."

WAITING-WOMAN. Ah, my poor mistress! She is almost in a swoon already!

MASTER QUILL. Write, Master Groat: "Whereto I solemnly affix my seal and signature, in the presence of these my witnesses——"

ALDERMAN [*writing*]. "—these my witnesses." [*He turns ANN'S chair so that the deed lies before her.*] You shall make your mark, my love. So, it is finished. Here is the deed, Master Quill.

MASTER QUILL. It shall be guarded in my strong-room.
[*He takes the deed and goes down L.*]

[*As the ALDERMAN rises the voice of MASTER SUNDER is heard in the street.*]

ALDERMAN. But what sound do I hear? Is a storm approaching?

MASTER QUILL. That is the voice of the surgeon, Master Sunder.

ALDERMAN. Is it possible?

MASTER SUNDER [*in the distance*]. Make way, make way, good people all, for Master Julep, the wise physician. Make way, make way!

WAITING-WOMAN. Ah, I fear for my poor mistress ! See how she trembles now !

ALDERMAN. I am myself alarmed that I confess. [To ANN] My love, will you await the faculty in your own chamber ? No, she shakes her head ; she wishes to remain ! My brave Ann !

MASTER SUNDER [outside]. Should any poor man have a wart upon his nose let him but wait, and we will presently remove it free of cost. Nay, we will extirpate a tumour for the first-comer of a score—only make way ! Where is the house of Alderman Groat, the haberdasher, who seeks our aid ? [Knocking at the door.

MASTER QUILL [crossing over R. towards the door]. After the blast of his voice truly his knock is but a tinkle ! [The ALDERMAN hurries to the door.

ALDERMAN. Ah, let me open myself to these great doctors !

[ANN has risen, and she and her WAITING-WOMAN cross over L., where they stand together.

MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE enter first, and bow low on either side of the doorway. They are followed by MASTER JULEP, the physician. MASTER JULEP advances to the C. of stage before he speaks.

MASTER JULEP. Where is Alderman Groat, the haberdasher ?

ALDERMAN [coming forward]. I am here.

MASTER JULEP. I am Master Julep, the physician, at your service. These are my humble fellow-craftsmen, Master Sunder, the surgeon, and Master Ounce, the apothecary.

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE bow low in turn : then both go down stage R.

ALDERMAN. Masters, I bid you welcome to my house.

MASTER JULEP. And, pray, where is the subject of our skill ?

ALDERMAN [pointing to ANN]. Alas, you see before you my own wife, who implores your aid !

MASTER JULEP [addressing ANN]. Madam, I am privi-

leged to grant that boon. But you are silent. You perceive, masters—she speaks not a word!

ALDERMAN. I must tell you, good gentlemen, that my wife—

MASTER JULEP. Say no more, Master Alderman: it is for us to establish the nature of the ailment. Bring me my spectacles. [MASTER OUNCE *hands them to him.*] Hum! I perceive that she is young and comely. Pray feel her pulse, Master Sunder.

MASTER SUNDER. Most willingly, honoured master!

[MASTER SUNDER *approaches ANN.*
MASTER JULEP. Nay, I will feel it myself. [*He comes to ANN and feels her pulse.*] The beat is gentle, gentle—Let her be seated.

ALDERMAN. I wish to say, masters, that my wife—
[MASTER SUNDER *crosses to ANN, and brings her to the chair L. of the table.*

MASTER JULEP. Do you discover any deformity of her figure, Master Sunder?

[MASTER SUNDER *turns ANN round and round before seating her. The ALDERMAN goes down stage R.*

MASTER SUNDER. None as yet, honoured master, none as yet.

ALDERMAN [*returning to them*]. Pray let me speak, good masters! Unhappily my wife—

MASTER JULEP. Have patience, Master Alderman, patience. Come, Master Ounce, regard her. Is she not as sound as a roach?

[MASTER OUNCE *makes his examination of ANN.*

MASTER OUNCE. That is but an appearance, no doubt.

MASTER JULEP. You are right, Master Ounce: a physician cannot be deceived. Nay, I have already inferred the cause of her disorder.

[*He thrusts MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE aside, and they go down stage R., chanting in unison.*

MASTER SUNDER. O wise physician!

MASTER OUNCE. O honoured master!

ALDERMAN. I am in despair! Pray let me tell you, masters——

[*He approaches* MASTER SUNDER *and* MASTER OUNCE.

MASTER JULEP. I will tell you, Master Alderman, what ails your wife. [*The ALDERMAN turns to him.*] Prepare yourself for grave news. She suffers from an aphony.

ALDERMAN. An aphony? What is that?

MASTER JULEP. It is otherwise known to the learned as obmutescence, or to the vulgar as want of speech.

ALDERMAN. Alas, my poor wife has been dumb from her birth!

MASTER JULEP. Master Alderman, you have the honour to confirm my judgment. I was myself about to declare her malady inherent, or, in other words, indigenous and ingenerate.

WAITING-WOMAN. Alas, my poor mistress!

ALDERMAN. Nay, masters, I swear it is only inborn!

MASTER JULEP. Doubtless you agree with me, Master Sunder?

MASTER SUNDER [*bowing low*]. I agree, honoured master.

MASTER JULEP [*coming down R. to ALDERMAN*]. As for yourself, Master Alderman, you are the wisest of men.

ALDERMAN. Because I have married a dumb wife?

MASTER JULEP. Because you have sent for me, Master Alderman! [*He returns C. of stage.*] How rare is such discernment in a man of your riches and rank, inhabiting so noble a mansion as this! There is but one doctor who can cure your wife's infirmity, and I am he!

ALDERMAN. Indeed, I am glad to hear it, Master Julep!

MASTER JULEP. By the grace of Heaven and the aid of Master Sunder, my surgeon, I have loosened the tongue of countless mutes in my time. Nay, it is reckoned that the words I have released, were they written down in never so fine a hand, would stretch from Cheapside to the mountains of Tartary. As for the ligaments I have severed in this same operation, a ship's rope could be made of them and yet leave fathoms to spare.

ALDERMAN. Is it possible ?

MASTER JULEP. Let me but reach out my hand towards your wife. [*He takes ANN by the shoulder.*] This arm is a divining-rod. It tells me that her lips are a well of joyful speech.

ALDERMAN [*coming to C. of stage*]. Aye, that is truly my hope, Master Julep ! I would have her speak to me lovingly, and therefore I have entreated your aid.

MASTER JULEP. Then let your lady be led to her chamber, if you please.

ALDERMAN. Can you not perform your surgery here ?

MASTER JULEP. The tongue of an alderman's wife must not be loosened in the public view, like any pauper's. Master Ounce will assure you of the need for her withdrawal.

MASTER OUNCE. The prone posture is most favourable to the efficacy of my potion.

MASTER SUNDER. And to my cleavage of the ligaments.

[MASTER OUNCE and MASTER SUNDER go towards ANN, as if to lead her from the room.]

ALDERMAN. Stay, good masters, for mercy's sake ! What is this potion you speak of ? What are these ligaments ?

MASTER JULEP. Master Alderman, it is not for the laity to know the secrets of our craft. Nay, we should not speak of them in the patient's own presence.

ALDERMAN [*taking leave of ANN L.C.*]. Go, my poor Ann, but first let me embrace you ! Go, my treasure !

[ANN and her WAITING-WOMAN go out L., and MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE stand awaiting MASTER JULEP's orders.]

MASTER JULEP. That is well. Come, masters, let us follow her.

ALDERMAN. May I not be present at your cure ?

MASTER JULEP. Assuredly not, Master Alderman. The birth of speech must be veiled in a decent privacy.

MASTER QUILL. Ahem ! [*Interposing*] As his Worship's attorney, Master Julep, I must support his right to be present, should he so desire.

MASTER JULEP. Master Quill, we of the learned professions understand each other. Need I say more?

MASTER QUILL. I thank you, Master Julep, and withdraw my claim. [MASTER QUILL goes down stage L.]

ALDERMAN. Nay, that you shall not! I demand what is my right, Master Julep!

MASTER JULEP. So be it. Call for your instruments, Master Sunder.

MASTER SUNDER. Ho, there! Bring me the instruments that are carried on my mule!

[He goes to the door R., and the leathern bag of instruments is handed to him.]

ALDERMAN. On his mule? What armoury can this be? [MASTER SUNDER opens the bag and displays its contents.]

MASTER SUNDER. My instruments are ready, honoured master!

ALDERMAN [crossing over R.]. Ah, what do I behold? That saw, those knives, those pliers!

MASTER SUNDER [showing his instruments]. My lancets and my forceps, Master Alderman!

ALDERMAN [recoiling]. I shudder for my poor Ann!

MASTER JULEP. Do you still desire to be a witness of our skill?

ALDERMAN. No, masters, not for the world! I pray you, no!

MASTER JULEP. Then we permit you to remain below. [He goes to the door L.] Your instruments, Master Sunder! Your chest, Master Ounce!

MASTER SUNDER. All is ready, honoured master!

MASTER OUNCE. All is ready, honoured master!

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE cross over together to L.C., while MASTER QUILL goes up stage L., as if to join the party in leaving the hall.]

ALDERMAN. Ah, not so fast, masters, I beg of you! [He goes C., behind the table.] Here is wine. Pray refresh yourselves before your dreadful task!

MASTER JULEP [blandly]. Indeed a happy thought,

Master Alderman! [*He joins the ALDERMAN behind the table.*] The draught will expel a multitude of bodily humours. [*To his colleagues*] A happy thought, masters, is it not?

MASTER SUNDER. It will nerve our sinews, honoured master.

[*MASTER SUNDER comes to the table, where the ALDERMAN is beginning to pour out wine. MASTER JULEP calmly takes the flask from his host's hand and thrusts him aside, making room for MASTER SUNDER.*]

MASTER JULEP. Nay, let me pour the wine, Master Alderman, for I see your hand is shaking. [*He distributes cups of wine, while the ALDERMAN goes R. of the table.*] Will you take a phial of liquor with us, Master Ounce?

MASTER OUNCE. You are too kind, honoured master. [*He joins MASTER SUNDER and MASTER JULEP behind the table, and drinks.*] Your health, Master Alderman!

ALDERMAN [*reaches out his hand for a cup of wine, but is forestalled by MASTER SUNDER, who is standing nearest him.*] Alas, masters, it is not my health that troubles me, but my wife's!

MASTER JULEP. Ha, ha! Very good, Master Alderman! You are a wag!

ALDERMAN. Indeed I did not know it, gentlemen!

MASTER JULEP [*pouring wine*]. Another cup, Master Sunder? A cup, Master Quill? We of the learned professions must not quarrel.

MASTER QUILL. No, indeed, Master Julep!

[*MASTER QUILL comes down to left of table, and joins the group of drinkers.*]

MASTER JULEP. Your health, Master Alderman!

MASTER SUNDER. Your health!

MASTER OUNCE. Your health!

[*All drink deeply, MASTER SUNDER and MASTER JULEP turning their backs upon the ALDERMAN, who endeavours to attract their attention.*]

ALDERMAN [*despairingly*]. Master Quill—Master Julep—Master Sunder—Master Ounce—I beg of you, masters, not to forget your errand !

MASTER JULEP [*turning to him between two gulps of wine*]. Nay, do not jest again ! Very good, Master Alderman ! Ha, ha !

MASTER SUNDER [*setting down his cup*]. Ha, ha, ha !

MASTER OUNCE [*joining in*]. Ha, ha ! Ha, ha ! Ha, ha !

[*All laugh together, except the ALDERMAN, who makes hopeless gestures, as though to quell their merriment.*

[*The curtain falls to denote a lapse of time, and rises again on the same scene, the same evening. The stage is empty. There is a knock at the door R. The MANSERVANT enters L., crosses over to open the door, and admits MASTER QUILL, who comes R.C.*

MASTER QUILL. Is his Worship the Alderman at home this evening ?

MANSERVANT. Yes, Master Quill.

[*The MANSERVANT comes L.C.*

MASTER QUILL. So now it seems you know my name ?

MANSERVANT. Pray be seated, Master Quill.

[*MASTER QUILL sits R. of table.*

His Worship bade me inform him of your coming.

MASTER QUILL. No doubt he is with your mistress ?

MANSERVANT. His Worship is in his counting-house. I will bring him to you. [*Exit L.*

MASTER QUILL [*alone*]. That is a hasty fellow ; he was gone again before I could ask after his mistress. But no matter ; I shall hear the good news from her own lips, if the surgeon did his work aright. And I must claim my share of his fee, for I swear he does not profit by such a patient every day. [*Rises.*] Here is the Alderman himself. [*The ALDERMAN enters.*] I wish your Worship good evening.

ALDERMAN. Good evening to you, Master Quill.

[*He remains on the threshold of the doorway L.*

MASTER QUILL. And how goes it with your lady wife since this morning's little operation ?

[*The ALDERMAN, still in the doorway, looks apprehensively behind him, then closes the door.*]

ALDERMAN. I thank you, Master Quill, she is well enough, well enough.

MASTER QUILL. Why were you in your counting-house, and not at her bedside ?

ALDERMAN [*comes to L. of table*]. I had some reckonings to prepare. And, as I say, my wife is well enough.

MASTER QUILL. Then have the faculty truly loosened her tongue ?

ALDERMAN [*sits L. of table*]. Aye, Master Quill, of that there can be no doubt !

MASTER QUILL [*sits R. of table*]. Tell me what has passed.

ALDERMAN. I was admitted to her chamber to hear the first words that she should utter. Ah, Master Quill, you can imagine my feelings at that moment ! There she lay propped among her pillows, with a smile of happiness on her face. The surgeon was gathering up his weapons, the apothecary was mixing the potion that should finally restore her. Scarcely had it passed her lips when she opened them again, and, looking earnestly upon me, said, "My darling, I can speak !"

MASTER QUILL. Well, that was a good beginning.

ALDERMAN. It was a rare beginning. Nay, it was all I wished to hear ! She called me her darling ; she said that she could speak.

MASTER QUILL. And what then ?

ALDERMAN. At these words there arose such a clamour from the faculty, in praise of themselves and one another that I could hear no more. Master Sunder, the surgeon, especially was in good voice. While the din was at its height I saw that my wife's lips were still moving, and, thrusting the faculty from the room, I hastened to her side. Alas, Master Quill, judge of my dismay to hear her prattle unceasingly of ribbons and laces, velvets and muslins and silks !

MASTER QUILL. That should not unduly distress a haberdasher like yourself.

ALDERMAN. It is the volume of her speech, even more than the matter, that disquiets me.

MASTER QUILL. Remember that she has passed her lifetime thus far without speaking, and some arrears must in the course of nature be discharged. Happily she is young, or you might indeed be overwhelmed by her pent-up flood of utterance.

ALDERMAN [*leaning his head on his hand*]. I am overwhelmed already, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL. The torrent will subside, Master Groat. Have patience; it will at least diminish.

ALDERMAN. Ah, it is plain that you have not yet heard her!

MASTER QUILL. I shall presently have that satisfaction. Meanwhile here is your deed of settlement, which I beg you to read at your leisure.

[MASTER QUILL proffers a parchment, which the ALDERMAN lays unheeded on the table.]

ALDERMAN. Shall I ever enjoy a moment's peace again? Master Quill, she leapt from her bed to address me; she pursued me step by step to my counting-house, until I locked her out. The very servants are deafened by her! Nay, when she stood at a window this afternoon conversing with her maid a crowd assembled in the street to listen, and the watch came knocking to demand the reason for this disturbance of the City traffic!

MASTER QUILL. I see your plight is graver than I thought. Perhaps I had better take my leave. [*Rises*].

ALDERMAN [*rises*]. No, Master Quill, for the love of Heaven do not desert me! You are my attorney; tell me what I am to do!

MASTER QUILL. You can only have patience. But do I hear her?

ALDERMAN. Yes, she is coming this way! Ah, stand by me, Master Quill!

MASTER QUILL. Let us seat ourselves and consider

this deed of settlement. When she sees that we are occupied she will hardly interrupt us.

[MASTER QUILL *seats himself briskly, while the ALDERMAN subsides hopelessly into the chair.*

ALDERMAN. Alas, you do not know her !

[ANN *enters L., and comes quickly to her husband.*

ANN. My darling, so you are there ! I looked for you everywhere, and you were not to be found. They told me that you were still in your counting-house ; but our servants are lazy good-for-nothings who say whatever comes first into their heads. Do you not agree with me, my darling John ?

[*Leans on his shoulder.*

ALDERMAN. My love, this is Master Quill, the attorney, whom you remember. We have important business to transact !

[ANN *goes C. behind table, and gives her hand to*

MASTER QUILL, *who rises formally and seats himself again.*

ANN. Of course, I remember Master Quill very well. How could you think I had forgotten him ? Why, he was here this morning when we came from the fair, and it was he who told you of the famous doctor who loosened my tongue. I am sure, John, you are very grateful to him. But must you be busy on such a day as this ? Remember it is the feast of Saint Bartholomew, when all the town makes holiday. That is the reason for the fair on Smithfield ; is it not so, Master Quill ? Besides, my birthday falls this day week : have you forgotten that ? What are these papers before you ? No, you need not tell me : your affairs can wait until to-morrow.

ALDERMAN. My love, they are your affairs !

MASTER QUILL. This deed of settlement is to be your birthday present, Mistress Ann.

ANN. A birthday present for me ! [She *goes L. of the ALDERMAN.*] Ah, my darling John, let me kiss you ! [Kisses him.] So you had not forgotten after all ! I was sure of it, although until to-day I could not tell you so. And what is a deed of settlement, Master Quill ? I know

you are a great lawyer, and you must be able to tell me everything.

MASTER QUILL. Mistress Ann, your husband wishes to endow you very handsomely.

ANN. My dear generous John! Let me kiss you again! [*Kisses him.*] To think, Master Quill, that I was only a poor orphan until he married me, and now I am one of the great ladies of Cheapside! It is true I come of good family—that goes without saying. Yes, we are first cousins to the landed gentry, and some people might say that John had done well for himself. My aunt Judith said so on the very day of the wedding. [*To the ALDERMAN*] Do you remember, my love? But I see you are busy, Master Quill, and I must not disturb you.

MASTER QUILL. I thank you, Mistress Ann.

ANN. Only tell me one thing. Shall I be rich enough to buy the hood I saw yesterday at the shop of Master Ell in the Poultry?

ALDERMAN [*raising his clenched hands*]. Alas, I despair! My rival! my rival!

MASTER QUILL. Madam, you will be rich enough to buy Master Ell's whole establishment, but Master Groat here would prefer you to deal at his own.

ANN. John, I promise you I will think no more of that hood, though I had set my heart upon it. Why do you not keep such pretty things? It was edged with satin, Master Quill, and trimmed with fine lace. Nay, I will think no more of it.

ALDERMAN. That is well.

ANN [*L.C. at first, then beginning to walk round the table*]. Other matters are more pressing, that is true. There is the furnishing of this house, which I must undertake afresh from the beginning. Our plate, our linen, our earthenware—all are cracked or moth-eaten or tarnished. Yes, my love, I must confess it, even before a guest! There is scarcely an article in use that does not need repair. These very cushions on which you are seated must be re-covered forthwith. Let

me show them to you. [*She comes below table to C.*] I will trouble you but a moment, Master Quill. [*MASTER QUILL rises.*] Do you not see how the leather has perished? Can you not feel it? [*Goes R.*] That is an effect of the City air, for too many fires are burned in winter-time, and smoke and damp are enemies of leather. But, tell me, are such seats fit for an alderman's household? [*She replaces cushion, and comes C. to front of table.*] Then look at this cover on the table. Is not the embroidery worn to a thread? Nay, you shall pick up your parchments presently; but look at that crazy footstool first. Only consider how a bachelor can live, and how needful is a woman's hand after his marriage!

ALDERMAN [*rises*]. My love, all this may be true, but now, I pray you, leave us!

[*MASTER QUILL is bending to pick up his parchment when ANN addresses him again.*]

ANN. There, Master Quill, you see that the best of husbands cannot endure to have his faults admitted before company. [*To the ALDERMAN*] Am I not right, my pet? But I vow I could take you from room to room, from cupboard to cupboard, and show you such havoc and disorder as must make a woman blush! No doubt a part of the trouble is due to your servants, who must have robbed you shamefully. [*Advancing on the ALDERMAN L.C.*] You are too trustful, John: you have never kept a watch upon them as you should. But now they shall know that a mistress is here.

ALDERMAN. It is all too plain!

[*Goes down stage L., retreating from her.*]

ANN [*returning to C.*]. As for the neighbours, what they must think of us I cannot imagine. Not all of them are civil and obliging as your friend Master Quill, who stands here and says nothing. I vow I can see as clearly as anyone what is necessary to our position in life.

[*She advances down stage R. towards MASTER QUILL, who retreats from her in his turn.*]

MASTER QUILL. Mistress Ann, it seems you have private matters to discuss with your husband. My business can wait until another day.

[He turns as if to go out R.]
ALDERMAN. Nay, do not leave me, Master Quill! For mercy's sake, do not leave me now!

[He drags MASTER QUILL back, and thrusts him into the seat L. of table.]

ANN. Master Quill shall stay with us, and then he will be able to judge for himself.

[MASTER QUILL mops his brow, and sits helpless. Meanwhile the ALDERMAN has sunk into the chair R. of table. ANN begins to walk round them again, and they follow her movements with their eyes.]

I have ordered a dish of lamb sweetbreads, for I know you love a fry, do you not, my pet? Our cook pretended that the butcher could not supply us on a feast-day, but I sent her with a message that if he failed us we would deal elsewhere. This is the only way of bringing such folk to reason. And now I will not disturb you any more; you shall be seated and go on with your deed of settlement. Stay, are you sure there is ink enough in that horn before you? Let me see. [She overturns the inkhorn upon MASTER QUILL'S knees.] There, now I have spilled it; the horn was overfull, thanks to some careless servant. Pray do not distress yourself, Master Quill; I will myself sponge your hose for you. Let me but fetch a napkin and warm water, with a little salts of lemon to take out the stain. Do not stir, Master Quill, lest the moisture should spread. I will be with you directly. [She runs out L.]

ALDERMAN [seated R. of table, buries his face in his hands]. Master Quill, my head will split!

MASTER QUILL [seated L. of table, leaning back]. I confess this lull is pleasing to me, though I am bespattered and somewhat damp.

ALDERMAN [looking up]. I am a lost man! What shall I do?

MASTER QUILL. We can but hope that she will weary her tongue.

ALDERMAN. Merciful heaven, she is upon us again!
[Rises and goes down stage R.]

[ANN re-enters L., with a basin and napkin, and kneels beside MASTER QUILL.]

ANN. Here, Master Quill, here is the remedy for your stain. Let me swab it for you first; nay, do not fear. I will not scald you: the water is but lukewarm. Feel it for yourself if you will. And here is the salts of lemon, which all the world knows is really the juice of sorrel. Is it not strange that such a thing should be so wrongly named? Yes, and it is dangerous too, for salts of lemon is a deadly poison, Master Quill. I have heard of a poor lady, troubled by a thirst and fond of lemons, who mistook the name and drank close upon a quartern of it, so that she perished in convulsions. Yet it is true that sorrel in the leaf is harmless enough; we even make a salad of it in the country. The taste is bitter, that is all. There was a time when I knew the virtues of all the herbs; but now from living in the town I fear I shall forget them. There, you see the stain is as good as washed away. [Rises.] What remains is only moisture, and that will quickly dry in this warm weather, especially if you walk a little in the room. That will prevent the risk of a chill. [Going towards the ALDERMAN, who stands R. staring at her] Is it not so, John? Why do you look at me so strangely? What is troubling you, my darling?

ALDERMAN [to himself]. Ah, shall I answer her or no?

ANN. Perhaps you wish me to leave you to your conversation. You know I would not interrupt you for the world. [She takes her husband by the arm, and leads him C., where she seats him opposite MASTER QUILL, in the seat R. of table. Then, busying herself between them.] Only let me dry your parchment for you, and set the table to rights. [She stands back, in front of the table, and regards them.] There, now you

are both at your case again. But you must not be long, for our supper is cooking, and sweetbreads must be served as soon as they are browned. You see I am a good housewife, Master Quill, and understand these matters, though my John was unaware of it until to-day. [*To the ALDERMAN, who is staring at her as he sits*] Am I not right, my pet? You are still looking at me strangely. What is it, my darling? Have you no appetite? Fie, you must have eaten too much at last night's banquet of the aldermen. [*To MASTER QUILL*] Ah, Master Quill, those City banquets should be put down by law! Scarcely one night passes when the haberdashers or the grocers or the fishmongers do not entertain each other, leaving their wives at home and giving themselves over to the most reckless gluttony. It is well enough for the provision merchants, for so they dispose of the superfluity of their wares. The skimmers too may be allowed a feast from time to time, and the salters are right to drink in moderation. But for haberdashers like my husband, or shoemakers like Master Foote, it is sheer waste of good money and good health. Mistress Foote spoke to me of this but yesterday. She was my first acquaintance among the City matrons, and I must say I found her very civil, though she is perhaps inclined to gossip. I knew that as soon as she complained to me of her husband's meanness. She should have kept her own counsel on that score, for I was little better than a stranger to her. Still, I think she is a kind woman at heart, and I shall ask her to visit me now that we can talk with one another. She lives over the way, so that we can meet as often as we please. Nay, we have only to open our casements and speak over the street, over the heads of the people. I must say these jutting houses of the City are very convenient in that respect, though they lessen the privacy of one's chamber a great deal. I had never seen such houses until coming to town the other day. In the country there is often a mile or two between neighbours. It may be true that Master Foote is close

in money matters, but then his wife declares that trade is bad. John says that cobblers are often discontented folk from thinking too much of other men's shoes. One of them was hanged as a follower of Master Tyler after the men of Kent marched upon the City. Those must have been dreadful and riotous days, though living in the country we heard but little of them. Of course, Master Foote is something better than a common cobbler, or else we should not know him, or his lady either. [*Turning suddenly to the ALDERMAN*] We met her as we were walking in Cheapside—did we not, my pet? She was well enough dressed, but that is easily understood, for she is a customer of ours. I see that one cannot be too careful in walking through the City streets, for scarcely had we parted from her when a young man I did not know at all smiled in my face and doffed his cap to me.

ALDERMAN. I am stunned; I am dazed. . . . Master Quill, what was that she said?

MASTER QUILL. Your lady spoke of a young man, Master Groat.

ANN [*comes R. of table to her husband's side, leaning on his shoulder*]. Have you forgotten, my darling? Why, you were there with me; I was on your arm and you dragged me away. Do you not remember the young man?

ALDERMAN. I remember too well! Tell me only—what did you think of that fellow?

ANN. I must say, my love, I thought him good-looking.

ALDERMAN [*springing from his chair*]. Ah! Ah! The hussy!

ANN [*turning calmly to MASTER QUILL*]. And very civil too, though it is true we did not know each other. Perhaps he mistook me for another lady. In the country all the neighbours know each other, but here in town it is easily possible to be mistaken. He was well dressed too, but I know that means nothing, for Mistress Foote tells me all the City apprentices ape the

fashions of their betters in these days. [*To the ALDERMAN*] Is it not so, my pet?

ALDERMAN [*going down stage R., wringing his hands*]. Will you be silent, shameless creature?

ANN [*pursuing him R.*]. John, my love, what is this look on your face? Why do you speak to me so roughly? I think truly you must be unwell.

ALDERMAN [*crossing to L.*]. I am in a fever!

ANN [*following him L.*]. Let me feel your brow, my love [*He stops short before her.*] Nay, do not stare at me so! I think you have a head-melancholy, for your face is ruddier than it should be. I remember my uncle was in the same disorder once after eating too much of garlic, so that the fumes mounted to his brain. The physician said that he must not be left without company; a bright and cheerful discourse is the chief remedy for such ailments. You may depend on me for that.

ALDERMAN [*coming to table L.C.*]. Master Quill, I shall go mad!

ANN [*following him*]. There, my pet, you should calm yourself, lest the distempered blood mount too far and bring on an apoplexy. For then we should have to send for the physician, and he would certainly bleed you. Nay, he might even shave your crown and bore a hole to let the vapours disperse into the air. I have heard of such a happening to a poor Kentish gentleman, and the hole was kept open a month together. But, alas, when it was suffered to heal his melancholy returned again tenfold.

ALDERMAN [*C. of stage, staring before him*]. The physician? Did she say the physician?

MASTER QUILL [*rises, and stands L.C.*]. Yes, Master Groat.

ANN [*beside the ALDERMAN C.*]. Come, my pet, there is bran in the house: I will myself prepare a poultice for your head.

ALDERMAN. For my ears! For my ears!

ANN. No, for your head, my love—

ALDERMAN [*crying out*]. For my ears! Ah, who will heal the blows of sound? Would that I had never loosened your tongue! Would that I had never married you, baggage that you are! Go, leave my hearing; leave my sight! Go, before I do you an injury!

ANN [*takes refuge behind MASTER QUILL, L.C.*]. Alas, my poor husband is run mad!

ALDERMAN [*thrusting MASTER QUILL aside and driving her before him*]. Do you hear me, creature? Go!

[ANN runs out L.]
MASTER QUILL [*seats himself L. of table with a long-drawn sigh of relief*]. She is gone, Master Groat. We are at peace again. [*The ALDERMAN paces up and down*

ALDERMAN. Call me my servant! Matthew, Matthew!

MASTER QUILL. Nay, reflect a moment, Master Groat—

ALDERMAN [*calling*]. Matthew, Matthew!

[*The MANSERVANT enters L.*]
MANSERVANT. I am here, your Worship.

ALDERMAN. Run again to the fair on Smithfield, more swiftly than before, and fetch me Master Julep, the physician with his train! Say that I require his services this hour, this instant!

MANSERVANT. I obey, your Worship!

[*He goes out R.* ALDERMAN *throws himself into the chair R. of table and stares before him.*

MASTER QUILL. What is your purpose, Master Groat?

ALDERMAN. This doctor shall make her dumb again, that is all.

MASTER QUILL. That is impossible! A lawyer like myself can tell you that a cord once severed cannot be rejoined.

ALDERMAN. Then he shall answer to me for his skill! I will enter a claim for damages against him in the court of common pleas! I will sue him for the return of those precious ligaments of which he has despoiled me!

MASTER QUILL. Master Alderman, far be it from me as your attorney to dissuade you from going to law. Yet I must remind you that the ligaments you speak of were her own property, being *in situ* beneath her tongue.

and, so to say, freehold. They were removed by her consent, and therefore she alone can enter such a suit.

ALDERMAN. Then he shall uproot her vocal organs, and extirpate her faculty of speech!

MASTER QUILL. Alas, it is all too certain that she will not consent to such a cure. Nay, should you force it on her she herself would claim damages for common assault.

ALDERMAN. Master Quill, is there no justice in this world? Has a husband no rights? I married a dumb wife, and not this chatterbox, this magpie who assaults my ears with her cackle!

MASTER QUILL. You have sent for the doctors, and they must prescribe your remedy. But if I may advise you do not make your wife an heiress as well as a gossip. I counsel you not to sign this deed that lies on your table.

ALDERMAN. You are right, Master Quill. Not a penny shall she have from me!

[He seizes the parchment and tears it across.]

MASTER QUILL. That is well. Now here come the doctors you have sent for.

[MASTER SUNDER'S voice is heard.]

MASTER SUNDER *[in a loud voice, as before]*. Make way, make way, good people all, for Master Julep, the physician, and Master Sunder, the surgeon, and Master Ounce, their apothecary!

ALL TOGETHER. Make way, make way!

ALDERMAN. Ah, let them come! I am ready!

[The ALDERMAN and MASTER QUILL rise. MASTER JULEP enters first, and comes down stage R., while MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE remain in the doorway.]

MASTER JULEP. Master Alderman, I am yours to command. What good fortune brings us again to your door?

ALDERMAN *[crossing over to him.]* An ill fortune, Master Julep! Never has any sufferer needed your aid as I need it now!

MASTER JULEP. Once more, Master Alderman, I praise

your wisdom in sending for me. Master Sunder and Master Ounce, you will examine his Worship.

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE advance upon the ALDERMAN, and lead him forcibly to C. in front of table, where they halt him before a chair. MASTER JULEP remains R.]

MASTER SUNDER [R.C., rolling up his sleeves]. Pray be seated, Master Alderman, and be so good as to loosen your doublet.

[MASTER QUILL, with an air of avoiding responsibility, takes a stool from under the table and goes down stage L.]

MASTER OUNCE [L.C., setting down his medicine-chest]. Pray be seated, Master Alderman, and do me the honour to show me your tongue.

ALDERMAN [looking from one to the other]. Alas, good masters, you mistake my meaning! It is not my tongue that is in question, but my wife's!

MASTER JULEP [R.C., approaching them]. Do you deny the cure I have accomplished in her case?

MASTER SUNDER [booming at the ALDERMAN]. Do you venture to reflect upon our skill?

MASTER OUNCE [chirping from the other side]. Do you trifle with us, Master Alderman?

ALDERMAN. Not for the world, good masters! But you have done your work too well!

MASTER JULEP. Does your wife suffer any discomfort in her conversation?

ALDERMAN. No, Master Julep, the discomfort is mine!

MASTER SUNDER. Has she any impediment in her speech?

ALDERMAN. Alas, none that I can discover!

MASTER OUNCE. Was not my potion efficacious in restoring her?

ALDERMAN. She speaks too much, good masters, and that is why I have summoned you in such haste. I beg of you, I implore you, make her dumb again! Restore those ligaments you have so cruelly severed!

[*The ALDERMAN turns to MASTER JULEP and falls upon his knees in supplication.*

MASTER JULEP [*blandly*]. You hear him, masters? Such is the strange ignorance of the laity in matters of science! Can we wonder that impostors flourish on every hand?

MASTER SUNDER. Indeed, no, master!

MASTER OUNCE. No, indeed!

MASTER JULEP [*raises the ALDERMAN, and places him in a chair C.*]. Master Alderman, there are bounds even to the skill of such learned craftsmen as you see before you. We possess remedies to loosen tongues, but none to bind them.

MASTER QUILL [*from his seat L. of stage*]. So much I was able to tell you, Master Groat.

ALDERMAN [*seated C.*]. Then I am lost, for I cannot withstand such a tempest of words! You have not heard her, masters! You withdrew before the storm was let loose upon me! Of your mercy, I pray you give me peace again!

MASTER JULEP. It is true that we of the faculty are often summoned to effect an after-cure in such a case. Am I not right, Master Sunder?

MASTER SUNDER [*R.C.*]. You are right, honoured master.

ALDERMAN [*to MASTER JULEP*]. Then will you seal up her lips?

MASTER JULEP. Our operation will be performed upon yourself, Master Alderman.

ALDERMAN. Upon myself?

MASTER JULEP. Happily there is a remedy for the discomfort you suffer from your wife's excessive speech. It is the state of surdity.

ALDERMAN. Surdity? What is that?

MASTER JULEP [*close to the ALDERMAN, with one hand on his shoulder*]. It is otherwise known to the learned as cophosis, or to the vulgar as want of hearing. Such a boon may be either inherent—that is to say, indigenous and ingenerate—or it may be accidental—that is to say,

adventitious and arbitrary—as, for example, a surdity resulting from a box on the ear, a kick from a mule, a discharge of gunpowder, or such untoward event. I counsel you to reject all these latter methods of producing the state you desire, for they are unduly painful and sometimes, alas, only temporary.

ALDERMAN. Not so fast, Master Julep! Do I understand that you wish to make me deaf for good?

MASTER JULEP. Your understanding is perfect, Master Alderman.

ALDERMAN. I thank you; so is my hearing. I have no wish to be deaf!

MASTER QUILL [*advancing to L.C., with a formal bow*]. I regret that my client rejects your proposal, Master Julep.

MASTER JULEP [*returning the bow*]. Master Quill, we of the learned professions understand each other. You will doubtless assist me in bringing him to reason.

MASTER QUILL [*to the ALDERMAN*]. Hum! It is true, Master Groat, that you should listen to the faculty with an open mind.

ALDERMAN. I prefer to listen to them with open ears. No, Master Quill, I am firm upon this matter!

MASTER QUILL. At least allow the learned surgeon to explain the nature of his cure.

MASTER JULEP. I assure you, Master Alderman, that it is painless. The surdity will be produced by a certain potion which Master Ounce carries in a phial. You have it, Master Ounce?

MASTER OUNCE. I have it, honoured master.

[*He takes the phial to MASTER JULEP, and then withdraws down stage L.*]

MASTER JULEP [*to the ALDERMAN*]. Here is the draught in question. You perceive that it is colourless and odourless. Master Sunder will have the honour to convey it to your lips. No sooner have you drunk it than you will feel a soft vibration of the tympanum, vulgarly called the ear-drum, and presently you will hear no more

—no, not even the thundering of nineteen hundred cannon at a salvo. Come, Master Ounce!

[MASTER OUNCE approaches with the phial.
ALDERMAN *[violently]*. Away, away! I will have none of your potion! I will not be deaf!

MASTER QUILL *[interposing between the ALDERMAN and MASTER OUNCE]*. Nay, Master Groat, do not be so hasty! I have myself heard your good lady, and it may well be that the learned faculty advise you aright.

ALDERMAN *[beside himself, going up to each in turn]*. Ah, wretched attorney, abominable surgeon, baneful physician, pestiferous apothecary, are you in league against my ears? Must I drive you from the house on which you have brought ruin already? *[They close in upon him, but he breaks from them and goes L.C., calling]* Ho, there, my servants! Matthew! Thomas! Rid me of this rabble! Away with these rogues and quacksalvers!

[They close upon him again. There is an uproar, in the midst of which ANN enters.]

ANN *[enters L. and crosses quickly to C., dispersing the group]*. Ah, what do I hear, what do I see? My poor husband! Masters, you must make allowance for him; he is certainly mad! Pray do not take offence, but aid me to govern his frenzy. See, here is a poultice I have myself compounded for his head, to reduce the distemperature. With your permission, I will place it on his brow—

ALDERMAN. Away, woman, away!

[He seizes ANN by the arm and thrusts her L., but she immediately returns C. and addresses the faculty, leaving the ALDERMAN L.C.]

ANN. You see, masters, how he mishandles his poor wife, to whom you have so mercifully restored the gift of speech. He has been in this mood an hour past—nay, since I first addressed a word to him and Master Quill, who is my witness. That is one of the signs of head-melancholy, is it not, good masters?

MASTER JULEP [R.C.]. Yes, indeed, mistress!

MASTER SUNDER [R. down stage]. Undoubtedly!

MASTER OUNCE [R. down stage]. Beyond question!

ALDERMAN [L.C.]. Ah! The baggage! The vixen!

ANN [C. of stage]. You hear him still, masters? You see I am right! I vow it is due to those City banquets he frequents, where too many liquors are mixed and rise up to trouble the brain. I doubt not, masters, you have heard of the band of young sparks who came one night into a tavern, and from the mingling of their liquor imagined themselves to be in a vessel tossed by a storm upon the waves, so that to prevent shipwreck they flung all the tables and chairs out of the window to make rafts for themselves on that sea, as they supposed; and all who saw them were astonished at their folly, *but they themselves continued in the fear of death by drowning*; until one of them, throwing an empty pitcher after the rest, was amazed to hear it crack upon the solid ground; and the watch passing at that moment and being struck by flying pieces of the earthenware, they were all seized together and brought before the magistrate; and, being still troubled in their wits by the liquor they made excuses to him, one of them saying that he was in the hold of the ship all the while, and therefore could not have thrown any piece of furniture from the portholes into the water; whilst another declared that he was at the time the helmsman of the ship, meaning that he was endeavouring vainly to turn the spigot of a cask of ale; and yet another, foolishly mistaking the magistrate, who was bearded, for the sea-god Neptune, swore that if he and his fellows ever came to dry land again they would build an altar to his service; whereat I have heard that the magistrate laughed a great deal, and bade them sleep off their folly, and go their ways; but I would have been stricter with them, for their pranks are not to be permitted in a city where there are many passers-by. [*The faculty gaze at one another bewildered.*] How many evils spring from intemperance in meat and drink! So it is, I fear, with

my poor husband, who is kindly disposed, and is no sooner seated with his boon companions at a City board than he falls to and follows their gluttonous example. Yet, I pray you, gentle masters, if the humours that vex him be not risen too far, do not make any incision in his head to let them out, nor even bleed him against his will, for he was especially angry with me when I spoke of such a thing, and I yet have hopes that he will recover of his own accord. [To the ALDERMAN] Am I not right, my pet? Speak to your Ann, my love!

MASTER QUILL [*L. down stage*]. Calm your fears, Mistress Ann. These learned doctors think of letting nothing out, but rather of letting nothing in.

ANN. Ah, gentlemen, how I rejoice to hear that assurance of your purpose, for I have heard there are some men who once being bled cannot contain themselves, nor can their physicians stanch the flow that issues from them, but they shrivel like parchment and fall into a stupor, so that none knows whether they be alive or dead. Pray do not think that I reflect upon your skill, good masters; that I would not for the world; and I am sure you know best what is to be done for my poor husband.

ALDERMAN [*seizes her and thrusts her aside, L.C.; then he goes C. and cries*]. Yes, indeed they know best! Your potion, good masters, for the love of heaven! Your potion!

ANN. What is he saying? What potion is this?

MASTER JULEP [*R.C.*]. Madam, you have most happily persuaded your husband to undertake his cure.

ALDERMAN. Your potion, your potion!

[*Sits on chair C. in front of table.*]

MASTER SUNDER [*coming to ALDERMAN's side*]. It is here, Master Alderman! Bring me the phial, Master Ounce.

[MASTER OUNCE brings the phial.
Pray open your lips, your Worship! So! So!

[*The ALDERMAN drinks. A prolonged silence.*]

MASTER JULEP [R.C.]. Is your task of healing finished, Master Sunder ?

MASTER SUNDER. It is finished, honoured master.

MASTER JULEP. O divine Æsculapius, begetter of all wise physicians, let us praise thy name !

MASTER OUNCE. O learned Dioscorides, master of the roots and herbs, let us praise thy name !

MASTER SUNDER. O health-giving Hippocrates, O great Galenus, let us praise thy name !

[*One after another the faculty cross to R. of stage, where they stand in line.*]

ANN [L.C., *gazing at the ALDERMAN*]. Do I see my husband smile upon me ? Oh, masters, what happy change have you wrought in him ? John, my darling, my love, are you now yourself again ? Are you not glad to hear me speak to you ? Are you not grateful to the wise physicians who loosened my tongue for me, and now have banished your own distemper ? Will you not look at me ? Why do you sit and smile without a word ? Are you not listening ?

[*She peers into the ALDERMAN's face.*]

MASTER JULEP. Madam, he is in a state of most enviable surdity.

MASTER SUNDER. Indeed, he is deafer than you were dumb.

ANN [*turning to MASTER QUILL, L. of stage*]. Oh, Master Quill, what have they done to my husband ?

MASTER QUILL. Mistress Ann, his Worship's ears are sealed to the world.

ANN. I will soon open them for him ! [*She shouts in the ALDERMAN's ear.*] John, you need not try to deceive your wife ! This is some jest of yours, but it is very ill-timed, let me tell you ! Remember we have guests in the house, who must be entertained ! Do not smile so foolishly ! Cease that twirling of your thumbs and answer me !

[*A long pause, during which the ALDERMAN continues to smile and twirl his thumbs.*]

ALDERMAN. All is blissful silence !

ANN. John, tell me you are not deaf! Masters, must I speak in vain? Ah, cruel husband, cruel doctors! Rogues and villains, I will have the law on you! Nay, these hands shall make their mark upon your faces!

[She crosses to them with upraised hands.]

MASTER JULEP. Hold her fast, masters!

[MASTER SUNDER and MASTER OUNCE seize ANN. Hold her, I say! [He goes to R. of the ALDERMAN.] And now, Master Alderman, I have but to mention the small matter of my fee. Ahem! Do you not hear me?

[A silence. The faculty look at one another.]

MASTER QUILL. Master Julep, unhappily his Worship cannot follow the drift of your request.

[He goes to L. of the ALDERMAN.]

MASTER JULEP. He follows it well enough! Master Alderman, for the double boon I have conferred my fee is forty pounds.

ALDERMAN *[looking in front of him, with a contented air]*. I can hear nothing.

MASTER JULEP *[threateningly]*. You will oblige me by paying it forthwith!

ALDERMAN. I am deaf!

[MASTER JULEP shouts in his ear.]

MASTER JULEP. My fee, my fee! Come, Master Sunder, yours is the more potent vocal organ!

[He withdraws R.C., and makes way for MASTER SUNDER, who leaves ANN and advances to the ALDERMAN's side, followed by MASTER OUNCE.]

MASTER SUNDER *[bellowing]*. Our fee, Master Alderman, our fee!

MASTER OUNCE *[in his shrill voice]*. Our fee, our fee!

ALDERMAN *[still looking before him]*. Heaven be praised, all is stillness!

[ANN, released by the two doctors on the R. of the stage, now rushes to the C. and disperses them again. She thrusts the faculty to the R.C., and herself goes L. of the ALDERMAN and screams in his ear.]

ANN. Wretch, trickster, renegade, turncoat, Judas, monster!

THE THREE DOCTORS [*in a crescendo of threats and outcries*]. Our fee! Pay us, Master Alderman! We claim our fee! Our fee! Our fee!

ALDERMAN. The world is hushed!

ANN AND THE DOCTORS [*in unison*]. Oh! Oh! The rogue! The traitor! Oh!

[*They close in upon the ALDERMAN, and begin labouring him and one another. MASTER QUILL comes down stage C. and addresses the audience.*]

MASTER QUILL. Now it is time for a man of prudence to quit the scene. And so, good masters and mistresses, here ends the comedy of *The Dumb Wife of Cheapside*, whose players are your dutiful servants.

CURTAIN

THE idea of writing a play about the Elizabethan theatre has tempted many dramatists. The story of that great age—the age of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Peele, Greene, Nashe, Marlowe, Kyd, Beaumont and Fletcher, Heywood, Dekker, and Massinger, to mention but a few—is full of inspiration. Within recent years we have had Miss Clemence Dane's "Will Shakespeare," Mr Emlyn William's "Spring 1600," the Hon. Maurice Baring's "The Rehearsal," and several others. In "Spring 1600" one saw only a momentary glimpse of the great dramatist during the performance of "Twelfth Night"; in "The Rehearsal" one saw him at work in the revision of "Macbeth"; and in "The Great Globe Itself" the author has been bold enough to speculate on the production of "The Tempest."

This is Mr Walker's first experiment in play-writing, but it will be evident that he has made a thorough study not only of the theory of dramatic composition, but of the history of the spacious times when the creation of masterpieces was merely an incident for daily gossip.

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

BY RALPH S. WALKER

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

JOHN HEMMINGS
HARRY CONDELL
SAMUEL GILBURNE
DICK BURBAGE
NAT FIELD
WILLIAM SLYE
RICHARD ROBINSON
WILL SHAKESPEARE
BEN JONSON
ROBERT GOUGH

The scene represents the stage of the Globe Theatre in 1611. All the characters, with the exception of Ben Jonson, bear the actual names of members of Shakespeare's company.

Shakespeare should be made up to resemble the Chandos portrait, Ben Jonson to resemble the Honthorst portrait, and padded to appear very stout.

NOTE. "The Tempest" stands first in the Folio Edition of Shakespeare's collected plays, published in 1623, after Shakespeare's death, by Hemmings and Condell.

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THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF¹

SCENE : *In the centre at the back of the stage is a curtained recess, with a balcony above it to represent the Elizabethan 'back stage.' Inside the recess is a small table, with a chess-board and a box of chessmen on it and two chairs.*

The centre of the stage is bare, but round the sides there are some chairs : R.F. a chair ; at the back, R. of arch, a large chair, with a stool beside it ; at the back L. of arch, a chair, with a few scene-location boards slung loosely across it (the scenes should not be from "The Tempest") ; on the left side, half-way up stage, a chair. There is a pile of papers at back, L. of arch, and on the right side up stage is a large property-chest containing an old cloak and the donkey's head used in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." At right, front of stage, propped against side-curtain, are one or two more location-boards set sideways with "A Sea-coast in Bohemia" uppermost.

The curtains of the recess are open when the play begins.

Entrances R. front, R. back, and L. back.

Music for songs by Purcell and Arne—but they should be sung unaccompanied and the repetitions omitted.

As the curtain rises HEMMINGS enters R.F. hurriedly, followed in a more leisurely way by CONDELL. Speaking over his right shoulder to CONDELL, who stands down C., he enters the recess and goes behind the table. He sets out the chessmen on the board, leaning over the table to speak to CONDELL.

¹ Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to the author, Mr Ralph S. Walker, c/o Messrs G. G. Harrap and Co, Ltd, 39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

HEMMINGS. Third rehearsal, Condell, and I wish I could say they even knew their words. Especially in the first act. It's hopeless; quite hopeless! But you know what Burbage is nowadays—won't learn his lines if he doesn't like them.

CONDELL. He's getting old, Hemmings. He won't admit it; but he knows it.

HEMMINGS. And Will's so positive. Listens to advice, but doesn't take it. One must admit he's often been right in the past, but this is something utterly new. None of us knows quite what to make of the play. I'm worried about it, I tell you.

[He comes out of the recess, draws the curtains, and comes down L. of CONDELL.]

CONDELL. It'll take a good deal to shake my faith in Will. He's never failed us yet. And yet—he can't go on for ever! That's true. Hemmings, I'm glad I'm better in time to come to a rehearsal before you go too far with it. I've always flattered myself I'm rather a good judge of a play. And I know what the public wants. Didn't I say *King Lear* was worth putting on?

HEMMINGS. We all knew that would go down well. Don't be ridiculous! There was a play now! Some noise about it—action—excitement—blood! But this new thing. I don't know. Burbage doesn't like it.

CONDELL. I know. Met him on the Bankside as I came along.

HEMMINGS. It's time he was here. It's time we got started. Well, what did he say about it?

CONDELL. Said it was a—trifle—downcome—a "mere dotage."

HEMMINGS. I wonder? I tell you what it is, Condell. Will's past his prime. Like you and me. They all write themselves out sooner or later. There's old Ben Jonson! In the Queen's day he could fill the house with the best of them. Now he writes the dreariest drivel and flies into a passion when the groundlings

scribble insulting messages and fling them on the stage.

[SAMUEL GILBURNE enters R. back, opens chest, and rummages in it. He takes out donkey's head, and, happening to become interested in what HEMMINGS is saying, is still holding it by one ear when he comes forward to interrupt.]

CONDELL. Yes, and comforts himself by swearing there are no plays like them, and most compassionately pities the whole world because it hasn't the wits to see how good they are! [He chuckles.]

HEMMINGS. Will isn't what he was——

GILBURNE [coming forward C. and interrupting]. No, that he's not! You remember when he had the old Queen choking and stamping at Sir John in *Henry Four*? Choking, she was, and stamping—aye, and purple in the face! At Sir John, she said it was, but if I hadn't played up as second messenger, where would the play have been? [He turns his thumbs down solemnly.] CondeLL, you remember my entry? [He goes up stage and takes a dramatic pose. Meanwhile CONDELL is mildly amused, but HEMMINGS is becoming very impatient.] "My lord, prepare; the king comes on apace." I hadn't any more words, but I fancy I put more spirit into those few than some who had more. I saw the Queen . . .

[He is mumbling on with elaborate gestures when HEMMINGS interrupts. Seeing that no one is paying any attention to him, he wanders disconsolately back to the property-chest, pulls away the donkey's head, takes out the cloak, which, after his next interruption, he begins to mend with needle and thread, sitting on the chest.]

HEMMINGS. It's time we started. It's very late. We ought to run over the troublesome bits first. When I think of that first act! A new piece too!

CONDELL. I'm curious to read this novelty. Have you my script? I'll read it now, and learn some of my lines.

[HEMMINGS goes back and rummages among the papers at rear.

But, Hemmings, if you think it such a risk, why not play one of the old favourites again?

GILBURNE [coming out C.]. Ah, that's what I say. I remember when we did *Macbeth*. I was third murderer. You never saw such acting. It was like this.

[He is beginning to act it when HEMMINGS, having found the script, comes down to CONDELL, pushing him out of the way.

HEMMINGS [handing script to CONDELL, who turns over the pages]. An old favourite! Man, this is not a catchpenny piece designed to please the mob alone! Haven't you heard? Didn't Burbage tell you? This is a royal command performance for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth. An old favourite! It has to be new—"fire-new," Will says.

GILBURNE [sitting on chest]. Aye, maybe. But what pleased the old Queen should please the young Princess. Cackling she was, as if she laid an egg. [Putting down cloak and coming forward gesticulating] And when I came on as second messenger . . .

[He goes on for a little, but nobody looks, and CONDELL interrupts him.

CONDELL. What does Master Benjamin Jonson, our bricklaying friend, say to this favour given to Will in preference to himself?

HEMMINGS. Will said he was going to invite the old fellow down to see a rehearsal. If he should come and we in this state! Ben's a harsh critic. [Going over L. and turning when BURBAGE enters] But I hardly think he will come. More likely to sulk over it.

[Enter BURBAGE R. front, and coming over C., followed by SLYE and FIELD.

Now, Burbage, why can't we get started?

BURBAGE. I won't do it, John. I won't do it. This is

the silliest stuff. [*Slapping his script histrionically*] This Prospero, now, where's my opportunity in a part like that? Haven't I made Will Shakespeare's name for him? Where would he be but for *my* Hamlet, *my* Othello, *my* Lear? And haven't I a right to say what I'm to act? What would this company be but for me? This command performance comes to it—why? Because Dick Burbage plays the lead in it. If I don't like the leading part surely that's enough to condemn the whole thing!

[CONDELL, *shrugging his shoulders, goes up to chair L. of arch, and settles down to read script.*

SLYE [*coming forward*]. Burbage is right, Hemmings. Will's given him another old man's part—and it's only reasonable he should, for Dick's too old now for a part like Hamlet or Othello——

BURBAGE. Old! I'll play you Hamlet to-morrow, but this Prospero——

SLYE. But what's wrong about this old man is that there's no fire about him. Will always said we "strutted and fretted" too much, but where would the door receipts have been if we'd listened to him? Now he's cut out all chance of a little really Fine Acting!

BURBAGE. I don't mind playing an old man like Lear, with a chance to let yourself go now and then with a "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout!" [*Ranting. Or a bit of pathos:*

"Pray, do not mock me:

I am a very foolish fond old man."

[*Very sentimentally.*

But this Prospero's no good. No Passion! No Pathos!

GILBURNE. Ah, now you're speaking! That was a play, that was! [*Coming C. behind the group*] Regan killed me, you remember, Condell. Like this it was.

[*He acts elaborately, falling as if stabbed, and rising stiffly and with much difficulty to find*

that nobody has been paying any attention to him, while HEMMINGS is speaking.

HEMMINGS. I tell you, Dick, we must put something new on the boards for the wedding. Whatever this play may not be, Dick, it's new, isn't it? Now, this first act. Let me see. [*Turning over pages*] Where on earth is Robinson?

FIELD. Why should Robinson play Miranda? I did Cordelia, Hemmings. [*Much aggrieved*] Why shouldn't I do Miranda?

HEMMINGS. Your voice is breaking, Nat, and you've grown too ugly. You can't play women's parts for ever. Now, for heaven's sake, let's start! And, Dick, even if we can persuade Will to write another we must go on with this till he does.

BURBAGE. It won't do. It's children's stuff. No Passion! No Pathos!

HEMMINGS. Now, let me see. [*Looking over script again*] There's Prospero's long speech to Miranda. You've hardly had a chance to try that over. We must run through it. Now, Burbage.

[BURBAGE and GILBURNE move down the big chair to C. of stage, and GILBURNE sets the stool at the right side of it. He then goes back to his sewing on the chest.

And where is that dirty little scoundrel?

[*Enter ROBINSON R. front.*

ROBINSON. Here I am. And not so much of the "dirty" when you address your leading lady!

[SLYE moves chair at R. a little forward and sits down. FIELD, standing beside him, expresses contempt for ROBINSON.

HEMMINGS. You're late! You ought to have your skirt on! But there's no time now. You must change later on. Let's get on. We'll take the exposition scene—the one after the shipwreck. You do it worst of all! Miranda is upset because she thinks lives have been lost in the storm. Prospero, take from "Wipe thou thine eyes."

BURBAGE. I will not rehearse this scene unless I have a guarantee that this brat will not snore in the middle, as he did last time.

HEMMINGS. He won't. And if he does——

BURBAGE. Well, well. Can't say I know this bit. Don't like it. "Thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter."——no——yes. [*Changing his character to that of Prospero, he speaks tenderly at first*] "Wipe thou thine eyes; have comfort."

[ROBINSON immediately wipes his eyes, and FIELD imitates him in mockery, calling SLYE'S attention to him.

HEMMINGS. No, no, no! Don't wipe them at once, like that. Wait, wait!

BURBAGE. "The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touch'd

The very virtue of compassion in thee"—hm, ha; let's see——

"I have with such provision in mine art

So safely ordered that there is no soul——

No, not so much. . . ." [*Testily*] Not so much what, Hemmings?

HEMMINGS [*looking on script*]. "Not so much perdition."

BURBAGE [*beginning to rant and rising in a crescendo*].

"No, not so much perdition as an hair

Betid to any creature——"

HEMMINGS. Softly, softly, there. You are forgetting. No prating. You must console her in gentle tones.

[ROBINSON is laughing at BURBAGE, calling SLYE'S attention to him by pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. FIELD at the same time exchanges defiance with ROBINSON, who consequently misses the cue to sit down.

BURBAGE. Aye, what did I say? This part gives one no opportunities.

"No, not so much perdition as an hair

Betid to any creature in the vessel [*speaking gently*]

Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink.

Sit down . . . sit down . . ." [*Furiously*] SIT DOWN, will you ?

[BURBAGE *sits in chair C., ROBINSON on stool at his right. FIELD sits down on SLYE's right, and imitates mockingly the movements and expressions of Miranda. The group in the centre is thus reproduced ironically on the right.*

"Sit down ;

For thou must now know farther."

HEMMINGS [*pacing over to extreme L. forward*]. A poor introduction to the exposition ! Will must alter this. [*Turning*] Now, Robinson.

ROBINSON.

"You have often Begun to tell me what I am, but stopp'd . . ."
Jove, Hemmings, that's true ! He has often begun and often stopped !

BURBAGE [*enraged*]. You . . . I'll . . .

[*He makes a dive at ROBINSON, who, jumping up, evades him.*

HEMMINGS [*angrily*]. Sit down, Robinson ; sit down, and hold your tongue.

[ROBINSON *sits and, putting out his tongue, holds it between his fingers with deliberation and impudence.*

"But stopp'd and left me . . ." Go on, you !

ROBINSON. How can I when I'm holding my tongue ?

[BURBAGE *threatens him.*

"And left me to a bootless inquisition,
Concluding—[*as if he had forgotten what follows*]
'Stay : not yet.'"

BURBAGE. Go on, then, puppy, finish it . . . finish it. Who's stopping now ?

ROBINSON. That's all. I have finished.

"Concluding, 'Stay : not yet.'"

HEMMINGS [*who has been very impatient*]. Oh, how shall we ever be done at this rate ! That's your cue, Burbage.

BURBAGE. Oh . . . hm . . . I mistook the sense. Let me see, yes.

"Canst thou remember [*speaking gently*]
A time before we came unto this cell?
I do not think thou canst for then thou wast not
Out three years old." [*Indignantly*] And, by heaven,
I doubt if you're much older yet, you squit, to judge by
your behaviour!

HEMMINGS [*distractedly*]. There must be no inter-
polations. How on earth are we to get through this
rehearsal? How on earth are we to be ready in time?
Now, after "canst thou remember . . ."

ROBINSON. "Certainly, sir, I can."

[*FIELD is mocking his speeches.*]

BURBAGE. "By what? by any other house or person?
Of any thing the image tell me that
Hath kept with thy remembrance."

ROBINSON [*scowling at FIELD and forgetting to act
Miranda*].

"'Tis far off

And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants——"

HEMMINGS. That's not it! A far-away look when
you speak those lines, as if you were trying hard to
recall something. What's wrong with you all? This
rehearsal's a farce! How can I help it if you don't like
the play?

FIELD [*bursting out and jumping to his feet*]. Hem-
mings, he can't do it. I tell you, he's no use. Now, let
me show you how it should be done:

"'Tis far off . . ." [*His voice is too deep.*]

ROBINSON [*jumping up, shouting and speaking very
rapidly to drown FIELD's words*]. "'Tis-far-off

And-rather-like-a-dream-than-an-assurance
That-my-remembrance-warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once that tended me?"

HEMMINGS. It can't possibly be done like that! We
must have a special rehearsal of those lines. That'll
never do—never do. Be quiet, Field.

[FIELD, who has been expostulating with SLYE, subsides again on the floor, and ROBINSON sits down.]

BURBAGE. "Thou hast, and more, Miranda. . . ." Is that right, Hemmings? What did he want with more?

[HEMMINGS nods impatiently.
"But how is it

That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?"

ROBINSON. "But that I do not."

BURBAGE. "Twelve years since, Miranda, twelve years
since,

Thy father was the Duke of Milan and
A prince of power [*impressively and with dignity*].
My brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio—
I pray thee, mark me—that a brother should
Be so perfidious!—he whom next thyself
Of all the world I loved and to him put

[ROBINSON, leaning head on right hand, pretends
to be falling asleep, which distracts BURBAGE.

The manage of my state"—hm, ha—"as at that time
[kicking ROBINSON] Through all the signories"—how
does it go?"—"it was the first [*with great dignity*].
And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal arts

[CONDELL, preoccupied with script, laughs suddenly, disconcerting BURBAGE, who regains
solemnity on seeing CONDELL unaware of what
is happening.

In dignity, and for the liberal arts
Without a parallel; those——"

[ROBINSON snores very loudly. There is an uproar.
ROBINSON jumps up and runs round back of
chair to L., pursued by BURBAGE. SLYE and
FIELD jump and run after them, GILBURNE
following. BURBAGE shouts, "I'll stand it no
longer! An impudent pup!" FIELD shouts
to HEMMINGS, who looks on helplessly from

extreme L. forward, "You see how it is, Hemmings. He's no good!" HEMMING'S wails: "Robinson, Burbage, will you sit down?" CONDELL still immersed in background. At the height of the hubbub enter SHAKESPEARE R. back, followed by BEN JONSON. A yell from ROBINSON, who holds his face, shouting, "Ow, my nose! It's bleeding!" They stop when SHAKESPEARE speaks, ROBINSON, L. centre forward, held by SLYE, BURBAGE, centre, held by GILBURNE and FIELD, looking threateningly at ROBINSON.

SHAKESPEARE [L. centre]. Hullo, Hemmings, what's this? A rehearsal of *The Revenger's Tragedy*? Dick Burbage complains to me that my play gives no chance to exhibit passion or pathos—but here we have both Passion [indicating BURBAGE] and Pathos [indicating ROBINSON] very well acted!

HEMMINGS. This pestiferous brat, whose bleeding nose is only what he deserves, persists in snoring when Burbage is in the middle of his long exposition speech.

SHAKESPEARE. Perhaps it is too long. A good idea, though! Miranda shall fall asleep during that scene, instead of later. But we'll cut the snoring, Robinson! Now go and cure that bleeding nose, and we'll wait.

[They all go out R. back, except SHAKESPEARE, BEN JONSON, and CONDELL, who looked up during the disturbance, but now resumes his reading.]

BEN JONSON [coming down R. centre to SHAKESPEARE, now down L. centre]. Good God, man, is that the way to write a play? Will, I've given you good advice many a time which you haven't taken, and now—a piece of fooling by a silly boy——

SHAKESPEARE. I've always valued your advice, Ben——

BEN JONSON. But never taken it! [Catching sight of scene-location board from "*Winter's Tale*" and brandishing it] You wouldn't have made a fool of yourself by laying a scene on the sea-coast of Bohemia if you'd

taken my advice to verify your facts. Any ignorant choir-boy knows Bohemia has no sea-coast!

SHAKESPEARE. I altered those lines in *Julius Cæsar* you objected to, Ben.

BEN JONSON. "Cæsar did never wrong without just cause"—ho, ho. Will, you altered two lines. I wish you'd altered a thousand. You'll never make a dramatist! But this masque of yours; I want to see it. Who should know more about masques than I? Haven't I written dozens? For kings and queens. I shouldn't like to repeat what the old Queen said of me. Why, Will, she called me her "paragon." And the King too! Well, well, it seems the old days are over. Modern taste is all for trash—trash and piffle—and when they want a Court masque they pass their old "paragon" by.

SHAKESPEARE. Well, this isn't exactly a masque, Ben.

BEN JONSON. Isn't a masque? Then what in thunder is it? Isn't it to be performed before the Court at a royal wedding?

SHAKESPEARE. It's rather different, Ben. This is to be acted by our own company, by the Lord Chamberlain's command; not by the lords and ladies of the Court, as your masques were.

BEN JONSON. Hum . . . I should hope not. Isn't exactly a masque? Now, that's just like you, Will. None of your plays is exactly anything. No dramatic theory behind them—nothing solid. Ephemeral, popular stuff, Will—won't last. Your tragedies, so called, aren't tragedies. They're full of stupid monkey-play and chatter between clowns. Look at the grave-diggers in your *Hamlet*, and the porter in *Macbeth*—and the fool in that farrago of nonsense *King Lear*. Crazy modern notions! Now, if this thing of yours isn't a masque, what is it?

SHAKESPEARE. I don't know. It's a sort of fantasy—a kind of "musical comedy." I haven't a name for it yet. Never can think of titles. What do they matter, after all? You know, in the end I have to leave it at

As You Like It or *All's Well that Ends Well*, or something equally leebble. I got the idea for this one from a Spanish novel——

BEN JONSON. Bah! There you are again with your novel-reading. Vulgar modern stuff! What does Horace say? Make the classics your models. You're content to plagiarize the worst of the moderns. It isn't only vulgar: it's dishonest.

SHAKESPEARE. What's the harm in plagiarizing an idea? All ideas are common property, Ben. Who was it said the other day that Catullus wrote "Drink to me only with thine eyes." I said, "No, that's Ben's"——and I meant it.

BEN JONSON. Who said that? Who was it? Was it Marston? Was it Dekker? I'll see him. I tell you, Will, "great minds think alike," and Catullus is a classic. But you, you write your plays round modern rot. Bah! I could have made a dramatist of you, Will—— [*At this point CONDELL, preoccupied with the script of "The Tempest," laughs suddenly and very heartily, disconcerting BEN. Seeing CONDELL unaware of him, he goes on*]——but you preferred to hear the mob applaud. Now, what's the result? My plays will stand scrutiny; they'll live when at last a generation is born to appreciate the scholarly and cultivated. Did I tell you I'm publishing them shortly as a collected edition of my works? [*CONDELL looks up and listens.*] Yours aren't worth printing, though they do fetch the crowd.

CONDELL [*coming a pace or two forward*]. Will, why don't you publish yours? An authentic edition of them all. It would take the wind out of the pirate-publishers' sails, if nothing else.

SHAKESPEARE. Well, you see, I don't claim to write works, Harry, like Ben. I only write plays! I don't care whether "future generations" read them or not, so long as they serve our turn here on the stage of the Globe. To tell you the truth, I rather think I've lost some of them!

[HEMMINGS bustles in R. back, followed by BURBAGE as Prospero, wearing magician's clouak, and ROBINSON, now dressed as Miranda.

All ready, Hemmings? [CONDELL goes back to his reading.] Ben's not going to be easily satisfied, I see, so we'll have to do the best we can if we're to please him!

BEN JONSON [going to property-chest and sitting on it]. Come on, then. Let's see this "fantasy," this 'what-is it' of yours.

HEMMINGS. Goughe has come at last and is changing, so if he's ready we can take it from the entrance of Ariel, who's supposed to be invisible, followed by Ferdinand.

BURBAGE sits on chair C., ROBINSON on stool sleeping. SHAKESPEARE sits on chair L. HEMMINGS goes back to speak to him when GUGHE enters.

That scene goes better than the last, thank goodness!

[Shouting] Are you ready there, Goughe, Field?

[Enter GUGHE R. forward as Ariel, looking back and beckoning. Moving across to L., he sings:

GUGHE. "Come unto these yellow sands,

And then take hands:

Curtsied when you have and kiss'd

The wild waves whist,

Foot it featly here and there;

And, sweet sprites, the burthen bear."

[FIELD enters R. forward, wearing sword, looking about him in a bemused way, and stands R. front.

FIELD. "Where should this music be? i' the air or the earth?

It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon
Some god o' the island. Sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the king my father's wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air: thence have I follow'd it,

Or it hath drawn me rather. But 'tis gone.
No, it begins again."

[During this speech GOUGHE runs lightly over to peer up laughingly at FIELD; then, making a gesture implying silence to BURBAGE, he runs back L. and sings:

GOUGHE. "Full fathom five thy father lies;

Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change.

Into something rich and strange.

Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell: Ding-dong.

Hark! now I hear them,—Ding-dong, bell."

FIELD. "The ditty does remember my drown'd father.

This is no mortal business, nor no sound

That the earth owes. I hear it now above me."

BURBAGE [to Miranda]. "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance

And say what thou seest yond."

ROBINSON [looking up, incredulous]. "What is't? a spirit?

Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,

It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit." [Rising.

BURBAGE. "No, wench; it eats and sleeps and hath such senses

As we have, such. This gallant which thou seest

Was in the wreck; and, but he's something stain'd

With grief that's beauty's canker, thou mightst call him

A goodly person: he hath lost his fellows

And stays about to find 'em."

ROBINSON. "I might call him

A thing divine, for nothing natural

I ever saw so noble."

[BURBAGE turns L. to make his aside to Ariel, and there is by-play, unseen, between FIELD and ROBINSON. ROBINSON, suddenly emerging from the character of Miranda, puts fingers to nose

at FIELD from behind BURBAGE'S chair, while FIELD scowls and threatens him with hand and foot. As BURBAGE stops speaking they instantly resume their characters.

BURBAGE [*aside*]. "It goes on, I see,
As my soul prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit! I'll free
thee.

Within two days for this."

[GOUGHIE goes out L. back, skipping and dancing.

FIELD. "Most sure, the goddess
On whom these airs attend! [*Kneeling*] Vouchsafe my
prayer

May know if you remain upon this island;
And that you will some good instruction give
How I may bear me here: my prime request,
Which I do last pronounce, is, O you wonder!
If you be maid or no?"

ROBINSON. "No wonder, sir;
But certainly a maid."

FIELD. "O, if a virgin,
And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you
The queen of Naples."

BURBAGE. "Soft, sir! one word more.

[FIELD gets up and starts back.

I charge thee
That thou attend me: thou dost here usurp
The name thou owest not; and hast put thyself
Upon this island as a spy, to win it
From me, the lord on't."

FIELD. "No, as I am a man."

ROBINSON. "There's nothing ill can dwell in such a
temple:

If the ill spirit have so fair a house,
Good things will strive to dwell with't."

BURBAGE [*as if going off L.*] "Follow me.

Speak not you for him; he's a traitor. Come;
I'll manacle thy neck and feet together:
Sea-water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be

The fresh-brook muscles, wither'd roots, and husks
Wherein the acorn cradled. Follow."

FIELD.

"No ;

I will resist such entertainment till
Mine enemy has more power."

[*He starts forward towards BURBAGE, who makes a pass at him, so that when he has drawn his sword he is charmed from moving.*

ROBINSON [*going over to BURBAGE*]. "O, dear father——"

BEN JONSON [*rising and coming R. forward*]. Will, Will, this is stupid, tedious stuff! A fairy-tale! Are all the inhabitants of London turned to mewling infants that this sort of milk and water should be offered them?

[*GILBURNE looks in to see what has happened.*

CONDELL makes as if to protest, but BURBAGE interrupts. CONDELL goes on reading.

BURBAGE. Ben's right, Will. It's not good enough. I tell you, you can't write a play without Passio——

HEMMINGS [*interrupting*]. Don't you think an old-fashioned tragedy would have been safer, Will? This ultra-modern comedy stuff—you don't know what to make of it. Tragedy's safer.

BEN JONSON. D'you call this thing a comedy, Hemmings? By Plautus and Terence, I don't! Will can't write comedy any more than he can tragedy! He'll never make a dramatist till he listens to Aristotle—and if I've said so once I've said it a hundred times. Look at your *Antony and Cleopatra*, now—more than forty changes of scene—Rome one moment, Egypt the next. It's against all reason!

GILBURNE [*pushing forward*]. *Antony and Cleopatra*! Now, that was something like a play. I was playing one of the messengers, you remember, Will, Hemmings. "Fulvia, thy wife is dead!" like this . . .

[*He continues to act, but nobody pays any attention to him.*

SHAKESPEARE. Why should Aristotle write my plays? He's been dead eighteen hundred years!

ROBINSON. And look at your very latest production what d'you call it? *Winter's Tale*, and—what's it?

WILLIAMS [taking heart again]. *Winter's Tale*? Aye, now . . . [He gets no further this time.]

ROBINSON. *Pericles*. In both of them the story over nearly twenty years!

WILLIAMS and ROBINSON, not being interested in this, but more concerned with their own argument, go off R. back, BURBAGE and HEMMINGS talking rather heatedly on L., BURBAGE putting a case and HEMMINGS apparently disclaiming responsibility rather helplessly.

It's worse and worse. All this modern craze for sensation, fantastic impossibilities! You take advice, and now what's the result? Your pantomimes only fit for apprentices and servants!

SPEARE. I really don't care a fig for Aristotle or 'unities,' Ben, but after all the badgering I've put them over at the Mermaid just for a joke at the rules this time! In my new play the ever shifts from Prospero's island, and the whole takes place inside twenty-four hours. What do you say to that, Ben? Reforming in my old age?

ROBINSON. Hum, well—it takes more than observances to write a good play. I never said that anything.

WILLIAMS [coming over]. Aye, Will. What we want is a play. A blood-curdler. Something with pace to it. Something fierce and furious. Something to make them slobber with pity one moment and set them on edge with fear the next.

WILLIAMS. Aye, when I think how the ladies screamed I don't think Will's done anything like it since, it was long ago. Still, I think I gave them a third murderer in *Macbeth*. Dick was standing, you remember, Will, and I came on—

[He is interrupted and at last goes back to his chest, shaking his head, and takes up his sewing.]

BEN JONSON. Melodrama! Melodrama, man! Do you call that Jeronimo stuff tragedy? But, Will, if this were a comedy I'd ask nothing better of you—but this thing of yours hasn't even the seriousness of comedy. What's the meaning? What's the moral? Now, what is the story?

SHAKESPEARE. I don't think it has a moral. I don't think any of my plays have. I'm not a preacher or a teacher. The story's this, though I hope you won't judge any play of mine by its plot: This Prospero is by rights the Duke of Milan, but his brother Antonio, with the help of Alonso, the King of Naples, has ousted him and banished him with his infant daughter Miranda. Landing on an uninhabited island, he has studied magic for years and obtained power over two creatures—Ariel, an airy spirit, and Caliban, a brutal, loutish monster. When my play begins his magic causes a tempest and a shipwreck to bring Antonio, along with the King of Naples and his son Ferdinand, to the island. Well, Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love, as Prospero intends, and when he's reconciled with his brother he gives up magic, and they all go back to Naples. There's some amusement to be had out of Ariel and Caliban—and the shipwrecked sailors get drunk. That's a good, lively scene!

BEN JONSON. Here's thin material enough!

BURBAGE. Thin and watery, Will! Thin and watery! Where's the opening for me? Where's the Passion—and the Pathos?

HEMMINGS. Well, I don't know—can't say. For want of anything better we ought to make the most of what we have. How can we rehearse with all these interruptions?

FIELD *[suddenly putting his head through the curtain at back]*. Before we start I should like to ask Mr Shakespeare, and Mr Jonson too, one question. It is this.

Why should this fellow Robinson, who is obviously no use at all, play Miranda, when every one knows I——

[ROBINSON is heard laughing inside the curtain, and HEMMINGS, who has been very impatient, shouts as FIELD'S head disappears :

HEMMINGS. No more of that now, Nat! Burbage, if you don't like the play you can, at least, act your part. [*He turns over pages.*] We ought to rehearse Act Five. I think all those that have a part in it are here? Let me see. There's Alonso, the king, that's myself; and Condell is to do the usurping brother. If you don't know your lines you must read them, Condell.

CONDELL. Oh, I think I can remember them. I've only half a dozen words! But I've been reading the play through, and my opinion is——

HEMMINGS. No more opinions, now, for heaven's sake! How shall we be ready in time? You're doing the bos'n, of course, Will—and Slye and Gilburne are the drunken sailors. Where is Slye? Slye! [*Enter SLYE R. forward.*] Slye, where's Samuel Cross? He should be here to-night.

SLYE. Why, Hemmings, Sam got a rap on the head with a bludgeon last night in the 'prentices' brawl in Fish Street. He isn't out of bed to-day. Didn't you know?

HEMMINGS [*distracted*]. What next, what next? What are we to do? He never sent me word. I haven't a substitute. Now, who's to do the part of Caliban?

SHAKESPEARE. Why, Ben will read Caliban! Won't you, Ben?

[CONDELL beckons BURBAGE over, indicates BEN and laughs.

BEN JONSON. What is this—Caliban?

[HEMMINGS gives him his script.

SHAKESPEARE. He's the monster.

[*At this there is covert amusement.*

BEN JONSON. I don't mind reading the part to help you out. But, Will, I hope there's nothing personal

intended here. Monster? You've not made a caricature of me, like Dekker or Marston, to make a mock of me in public, since you can't gainsay my arguments in private? If you've done that—

SHAKESPEARE. I never use my plays to express personal spite—you know that, Ben. I leave that to Dekker and Marston.

[When the difficulty as to who shall do Caliban's part has been cleared up SLYE goes back to GILBURNE, who is on the property-chest, and they both go out R. back.]

BEN JONSON. Well, you mustn't expect me to act. I'm no actor, though I tried acting when I was younger and greener. Acting does a dramatist no good. Actor-playwrights have vulgarized the stage—you and your like, Will. I shall simply read the words.

HEMMINGS. Come, let's get started—let's begin. This is the situation, Ben. Alonso, the King of Naples, that's me, and Antonio, Prospero's brother, that's Condell *[he shows CONDELL where to stand beside L.C.]*, have been put under a spell by Prospero. We haven't seen him yet, but we're beginning to come out of our trance. Will, your entrance will be there *[pointing L. back]*. Now, Dick.

[They assume their characters, behaving as if drowsily emerging from a stupor. BURBAGE standing R. of C. up stage. BEN JONSON sitting on the chest. SHAKESPEARE goes off L. back, to be ready for his entrance.]

BURBAGE. "Their understanding
Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
That now lies foul and muddy. Not one of them
That yet looks on me, or would know me: Ariel,
Fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell.

[GOGGHE runs out when called, fetches hat, rapier, and shoulder-cloak from recess C., and returns.]

I will discease me, and myself present

As I was sometime Milan : quickly, spirit ;
Thou shalt ere long be free."

GOUGH. [*running down R, while BURBAGE puts on his things, sings*].

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I :
In a cowslip's bell I lie ;
There I couch when owls do cry,
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily,

Merrily, merrily shall I live now

Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

[*He goes back to help BURBAGE put his things straight.*

BURBAGE. "Why that's my dainty Ariel ! I shall miss thee ;

But yet thou shalt have freedom : so, so, so.

To the King's ship, invisible as thou art :

There shalt thou find the mariners asleep

Under the hatches ; the master and the boatswain

Being awake, enforce them to this place,

And presently, I prithee."

GOUGH. "I drink the air before me, and return
Or ere your pulse twice beat." [*He turns out L. back.*

BURBAGE. "Behold, sir King,
The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero."

HEMMINGS. "Whether thou be'st he or no,

Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me,

As late I have been, I not know : thy pulse

Beats as of flesh and blood : and, since I saw thee,

The affliction of my mind amends, with which,

I fear, a madness held me. . . .

But how should Prospero

Be living and be here ? "

BURBAGE. "You do yet taste
Some subtilties o' the isle, that will not let you
Believe things certain. Welcome, my friends !

[*To CONDELL*] For you, most wicked sir, whom to call
brother

Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive

Thy rankest fault ; all of them ; and require

My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,
Thou must restore."

HEMMINGS. "If thou be'st Prospero,
Give us particulars of thy preservation;
How thou hast met us here, who three hours since
Were wreck'd upon this shore; where I have lost—
How sharp the point of this remembrance is!—
My dear son Ferdinand."

BURBAGE. "I am woe for't, sir."

HEMMINGS. "Irreparable is the loss, and patience
Says it is past her cure."

BURBAGE. "I rather think
You have not sought her help, of whose soft grace
For the like loss I have her sovereign aid
And rest myself content."

HEMMINGS. "You the like loss!"

BURBAGE. "As great to me as late; for I
Have lost my daughter."

HEMMINGS. "A daughter?
O heavens, that they were living both in Naples,
The king and queen there! that they were, I wish
Myself were mudded in that oozy bed
Where my son lies. When did you lose your daughter?"

BURBAGE. "In this last tempest. Know for certain
That I am Prospero and that very duke
Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely
Upon this shore, where you were wrecked, was landed,
To be the lord on't. Welcome, sir;
This cell's my court: here have I few attendants
And subjects none abroad: pray you, look in.
My dukedom since you have given me again,
I will requite you with as good a thing."

[*He pulls open the curtain of the back stage showing* ROBINSON R. and FIELD L. seated at the
table playing chess.

ROBINSON. "Sweet lord, you play me false."

FIELD. "No, my dear'st love,
I would not for the world."

ROBINSON. "Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
And I would call it fair play."

HEMMINGS. "If this prove
A vision of the Island, one dear son
Shall I twice lose."

CONDELL. "A most high miracle!"

FIELD [*coming out towards* HEMMINGS].
"Though the seas threaten, they are merciful;
I have cursed them without cause."

[*Kneels before* CONDELL.
HEMMINGS. "Now, all the blessings
Of a glad father compass thee about!
Arise, and say how thou camest here."

ROBINSON. "O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world,
That has such people in't."

BURBAGE. "'Tis new to thee."

HEMMINGS. "What is this maid with whom thou wast
at play?"

Your eld'st acquaintance cannot be, three hours:
Is she the goddess that hath sever'd us,
And brought us thus together?"

FIELD. "Sir, she is mortal;
But by immortal Providence, she's mine."

HEMMINGS. "I am hers. [*He then goes down* L.
But, O, how oddly will it sound that I
Must ask my child forgiveness!"]

BURBAGE. "There, sir, stop:
Let us not burthen our remembrance with
A heaviness that's gone."

HEMMINGS [*back to audience*]. "Give me your hands:
Let grief and sorrow still embrace his heart
That doth not wish you joy."

[*They go over and retire* L. half-way up stage as
SHAKESPEARE enters, wearing cloth sash and
cutlass, driven in by GOUGH as Ariel, L.B
Now, blasphemy,

That swear'st grace o'erboard, not an oath on shore ?
Hast thou no mouth by land ? What is the news ? ”

SHAKESPEARE. “ The best news is, that we have safely found

Our king and company ; the next, our ship—
Which, but three glasses since, we gave out split—
Is tight and yare and bravely rigg'd as when
We first put out to sea.”

GOGHE [*aside to BURBAGE*]. “ Sir, all this service
Have I done since I went.”

BURBAGE [*aside to GOGHE*]. “ My tricky spirit ! ”

[GOGHE runs down R. forward and sits cross-legged, looking on and laughing.

HEMMINGS. “ These are not natural events ; they strengthen

From strange to stranger. Say, how came you hither ? ”

SHAKESPEARE. “ If I did think, sir, I were well awake
I'd strive to tell you. We were dead of sleep,
And—how we know not—all clapp'd under hatches ;
Where but even now with strange and several noises
Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains,
And moe diversity of sounds, all horrible,
We were awaked ; straightway, at liberty ;
Where we, in all her trim, freshly beheld
Our royal good and gallant ship, our master
Capering to eye her ; on a trice, so please you,
Even in a dream, were we divided from them
And were brought moping hither.”

[GOGHE runs to BURBAGE.

GOGHE [*aside to BURBAGE*]. “ Was't well done ? ”

BURBAGE [*aside to GOGHE*]. “ Bravely, my diligence.
Thou shalt be free.”

HEMMINGS. “ This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod ;

And there is in this business more than nature
Was ever conduct of ; some oracle
Must rectify our knowledge.”

BURBAGE.

“ Sir, my liege.

Do not infest your mind with beating on
The strangeness of this business.

Come hither, spirit [*aside*]:

Set Caliban and his companions free.

Untie the spell.

[*Exit GOUGHÉ R. back.*]

How fares my gracious sir?

There are yet missing of your company

Some few odd lads that you remember not."

[*Re-enter GOUGHÉ, R. back, as if driving in GILBURNE and SLYE, who are wearing cloths knotted over their heads. It is pointed out to BEN JONSON by SLYE that he also is to be driven in. He is very dignified, and appears to resent being hustled. He makes no attempt to act the part of Caliban.*]

GILBURNE. "Every man shift for all the rest, and let no man take care for himself; for all is but fortune. Coragio, bully-monster, coragio!"

[*BEN JONSON looks indignant, and GOUGHÉ, unperceived, mocks him.*]

SLYE. "If these be true spies which I wear in my head, here's a goodly sight!". . . Now, Ben, man, your lines.

BEN JONSON. What must I say? Where's the place?
Ah

"O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!

How fine my master is! I am afraid

He will chastise me."

[*He reads as if contemptuous of the words.*]

BURBAGE. "Mark but the badges of these men, my lords,

Then say if they be true. This mis-shapen knave [*indicating BEN JONSON, who withdraws angrily, causing some amusement to the others*],

His mother was a witch, and one so strong

That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,

And deal in her command without her power.

These three have robb'd me; and this demi-devil—

For he's bastard one—[BEN JONSON *appears to resent BURBAGE's words, and looks more and more incensed*] had plotted with them.

To take my life. Two of these fellows you
Must know and own; this thing of darkness [*pointing
again at Ben*] I
Acknowledge mine."

BEN JONSON. Will, when I offered to read these lines I didn't suppose I was to be made a spectacle before these fellows! It's outrageous! You arranged it on purpose to flout me. I'll have no more to do with it.

SHAKESPEARE. Come, Ben, we're much obliged to you for reading the part. These words are spoken to Caliban, not to you.

BEN JONSON. Aye, but why did you pick me for Caliban? Tell me that.

SHAKESPEARE. Only because Sam Cross isn't here to-day, Ben. Come on, let's finish it.

HEMMINGS. We really must get on. It's very late. There's barely time to finish as it is.

BEN JONSON. Well, hm, what am I to say now? "I shall be pinched to death."

HEMMINGS. "Is not this Stephano, my drunken butler?"

CONDELL. "He is drunk now: where had he wine?"

HEMMINGS. "And Trinculo is reeling ripe: where should they

Find this grand liquor that hath gilded 'em?
How camest thou in this pickle?"

SLYE. "I have been in such a pickle since I saw you last that, I fear me, will never out of my bones: I shall not fear fly-blowing."

CONDELL. "Why, how now, Stephano?"

[SLYE nudges him.]

GILBURNE. "O, touch me not; I am not Stephano, but a cramp."

BURBAGE. "You'd be king o' the isle, sirrah?"

GILBURNE. "I should have been a sore one then."

HEMMINGS [*indicating BEN JONSON*]. "This is a strange

thing as c'er I look'd on." [BEN JONSON *again offended*.

BURBAGE. "He is as disproportioned in his manners as in his shape. Go——"

BEN JONSON [*furiously*]. That's meant for me. This is an outrage! I'll read no more of your fairy-tale, to be made a laughing-stock. [*They try to pacify him, but he storms.*] I'll not hear you. I tell you, I won't listen to you. I'll not stay here to be called a monster. You've gone too far! Comedy? Fairy-tale? Bah! Watery stuff! It's all about the sea, and, if you ask me, you're all at sea about it. It begins with a tempest, and it's not my fault if your rehearsal ends in one! It's all wind! Wind and water! Where's the sense of it? Fantasy? Fish and fiddlesticks!

[*He stumps out angrily R. forward.*

SHAKESPEARE. Wind and water? All at sea? Tempest? Very well, I'll call it *The Tempest*, and let the critics storm over it as much as they please.

HEMMINGS. But Will, Will, what are we to do now?

SHAKESPEARE. No more to-night. We'll have the whole cast down to-morrow and have a full rehearsal. Good night. Slye.

[*SLYE, GOUGHE, FIELD, and ROBINSON go out R. back, shouting "Good night" and "Good night, Will."* GILBURNE is putting the chairs back and closing the curtains of the back stage. CONDELL is speaking to BURBAGE earnestly, BURBAGE looking doubtful.

And, Hemmings, Ben's right on one point. A masque would be appropriate for the Princess's wedding. I had thought of that. I'm going to insert one in the fourth act.

HEMMINGS [*anxiously*]. Nothing, too modern, Will, I hope—nothing too unusual.

SHAKESPEARE. Just the usual wedding stuff. Juno, Ceres, nymphs, and so forth. You see, the actors can be spirits summoned up by Prospero to celebrate the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda—a last exhibition of his skill before he gives up magic for ever. And I've

got some lines for Dick, to follow the masque, that I'll read you now. And Dick, Harry, Sam [*calling them round him*—*R. to L.* BURBAGE, GILBURNE, SHAKESPEARE, CONDELL, HEMMINGS], as I wrote them I thought—this Prospero might be me. I'm getting on, you know. We're all growing old. I don't think I'll ever write another play.

BURBAGE. What, Will? There's life in us all yet!

CONDELL. Not write any more, Will? Why, whatever Dick, or Ben, or Sam here, says, you're doing your best work now!

GILBURNE. Will's right. The old plays were the best. When I think of *Titus* now, or *Timon*, or *Richard Three*, or *Henry Four*! And the old Queen laughing fit to burst her stays at Falstaff! I was second messenger, I was.

SHAKESPEARE. No. You get tired as you get older. This theatre life! It's too exhausting, I think it's best to give it up before you get too old. If you stay on too long its only natural to get embittered, like Ben! I'm going right away from it, I think. Back to the country . . . where I came from. Like Prospero going home to Naples. And yet it's hard to leave it all behind. It is hard. Nothing to look forward to, but just—well—to be forgotten. And all the plays we've done together and thought so much about—they'll be forgotten too—as Ben says [*smiling*], all plays but his will be. To think that even the Globe itself, our own theatre, that's meant so much to us, some day won't even be a memory! It's a strange thought how little we'll mean to those who follow us. [*A pause.*] Here are the lines for Prospero.

[*He holds the script, but does not need to read.*]

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

BURBAGE. Good night, Will, good night [*going*].

GILBURNE [*going out R. forward with BURBAGE*]. Good night.

CONDELL [*stopping HEMMINGS as he follows the others*]. No, Will. It mustn't all be forgotten. Ben gave me an idea to-night. Hemmings here will help me. We'll gather your plays, together and publish them. They must be published, Will. And, look here, I don't mind what Ben says, or Dick either, *The Tempest's* the best of the lot! It shall stand first of all [*declaiming*] in the great, handsome folio edition of Will Shakespeare's works!

[*They go off R. forward.*

SHAKESPEARE [*suddenly coming out of his abstraction and calling after them*]. Not "works," Condell—for any sake, not "works"! Plays, just plays!

CURTAIN

Mr A. J. TALBOT is another dramatist who (like Lord Dunsany, Lady Gregory, and Mr F. Sladen-Smith) prefers the one-act form to the longer play. He has a flair for humorous fantasy and grotesquery. Some irresponsible imp at his shoulder incites him to burlesque the dignified theme, or to treat with mock-solemnity the facetious or the trivial. In "The Spartan Girl" the winner of the *Daily Mail* prize for Channel-swimming describes her achievements in blank verse, and a running commentary of a horse-race is a parody of the style of Euripides. In "Lucrezia Borgia's Little Party" a tragic legend is turned to farce.

Mr Talbot's earliest plays—he has written over thirty altogether—were done for the Arts League Travelling Theatre, and they have become popular with Repertory companies. "The Old Firm's Awakening" and "The Film Star's Golden Wedding" are characteristic examples of his particular vein of humour. In "The Centurion's Billet at Swacking Bulphen" he has found a subject which will be amusing not only to pupils who are studying Latin at school, but to all persons who are acquainted with the Latin phrases which have passed into familiar use.

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT
SWACKING BULPHEN

AN EVENING IN ROMAN BRITAIN

By A. J. TALBOT

CHARACTERS

CENTURION

BALBUS, *his soldier servant*

CADWOL, *headman of Swacking
Bulphen*

HIS WIFE

CLAUDEN }
MORDRED } *their daughters*

ASTEL, *a female slave*

SCENE : *A room in Cadwol's house.*

TIME : *An evening at dusk, A.D. 61.*

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT SWACKING BULPHEN¹

SCENE : *A primitive room with bare mud walls. In the right half of back wall an opening without glass serves as a window, through which may be seen a flat landscape dominated by a small hill, now bathed in the light of a sunset. To the left of this is a heavily timbered door.*

In the right wall a log fire burns in a primitive ingle-nook fireplace. Over the fire is a cooking-pot slung on a tripod. Below this there is a door.

In the left wall there is an opening down stage, curtained with coarse material or skins.

The furniture is scanty and of roughly finished wood. There is a small table at R.C., on which is a crude candlestick, with two nearly burnt-out candles. Against back wall is a rough chair and stool, and a similar chair and stool are at left. Against left wall is a table, which is covered with an assortment of primitive pottery vessels.

Near fire is a touch of a higher civilization. A chair of Roman workmanship and pattern stands on a low rostrum. Convenient for the sitter's feet is a square of mosaic from a Roman pavement, held in position on the rostrum by a frame of thin battens.

When the curtain rises ASTEL, a strapping, slatternly Celtic girl in her twenties, is tending the fire and stirring the pot. She rises and brings chair from back wall to table. All the time she sings a barbaric chant in a low monotone.

Enter from L. BALBUS, a short, thick-set, bearded Roman soldier, carrying two wooden buckets of water.

¹Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 28 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ASTEL [*breaking off chant*]. Whoy, if it isn't Balbus ! What now, Balbus ? *Quid nunc* ?

BALBUS. *Semper idem*—always same. Much labour, little pay.

ASTEL. *Nil desperandum*. I see you're fetching water again. That's all you do, Balbus, fetch buckets of *aqua* for your centurion.

BALBUS. Yes, water. Plenty *aqua*. Centurion comes soon, yes.

ASTEL. It doesn't seem roight to me for fighting men to wash so much. But you Roman *milites* seem wonderful set on baths.

BALBUS. Yes. Centurion very clean ; plenty baths. All Roman *milites* very nice, very clean.

ASTEL. You had ought to be clean, I reckon, the *aqua* you use.

BALBUS. You—tribe of Icenii—no wash. *Nunquam*, never.

ASTEL. How many times have I got to tell you my tribe is Trinobante, me being taken for a slave by these thieving Icenii [*gesture embracing the household*] time I was a girl ? My nation's Suffolk. Can't you get that into your thick head ? Me Trinobante. Trinobantes *bonum*—Icenii, no *bonum*. *Comprehende*, you dazzy fool, you ?

BALBUS. *Non comprehendo* "dazzy fool."

ASTEL. Whether you *comprehendo* or not, that's what you are.

BALBUS [*giving it up and lifting pails*]. Centurion soon comes. *Tempus fugit*. [*Parthian shot*] You, tribe of Trinobante, no wash ! *Nunquam*, never.

ASTEL. Perhaps we Trinobantes wash more than you suspect. We don't sound the trumpet every time we have a bath. We don't go about all day crying, "*Aqua-aqua, lavo-lavo, washy-washy*."

[*She comes over with a heavy tread, and bustles him while he is helpless with the pails.*]

BALBUS. Stop ! [*Puts pails down.*] You—*elephanta* !

[*Easily driving her off by splashing her*] You—big elephanta.

ASTEL. No comprehendo. What is elephanta ?

BALBUS. Elephanta—animal. Very big. [*Shows height.*] Nosc long. [*Measures length with arm.*] Two teeth—very long. [*Measures them.*]

ASTEL. You talk hully like a fool. Elephanta indeed ! Anyone knows there's no such animal.

[*Steps heard outside.*]

BALBUS. Centurion comes.

[*He goes hurriedly off R., with water.* ASTEL goes to fireplace.

[*Enter CENTURION, door in back wall. He is a young clean-shaven man, swarthy and handsome, wearing full armour. He puts his helmet on table R.C.*]

CENTURION. Balbus !

BALBUS [*off R.*] Adsum, O centurio.

CENTURION. Venis ! [BALBUS comes on at the double, and unbuckles the CENTURION's armour.] Cur arma mea non polis ? [BALBUS looks shamefaced. CENTURION points to spots on helmet.] 'Decorum est centurioni galeam sordidam ferre ? [BALBUS stands rebuked. To ASTEL] To-night let there be sufficient candles.

[*Points a critical finger at candle ends.*]

ASTEL. Why do you want new candelas before it is necessarius ? These will last foine to-night, and I don't hardly like to ask the mistress for new candelas, for the domina's that mean you'd think her candelas was aurum gold to hear her go on, and what's more—

CENTURION [*covering his ears*]. Tace, puella ! Enough of words, Astel. To-night new candelæ in candelabrum put. That is my wish ; tell your domina. [*He goes off R.*]

ASTEL. What did the Centurion say to you, Balbus ?

BALBUS. Centurion say galea very nice, very clean.

ASTEL. No he didn't [*pointing accusing finger at helmet*] ! He said his galea was dirty. And so it is. I'd think for shame if I was you. But, there, you're not much of a mucher for work, and from what I can see for polish-

ing brass you're far too *suaviter in modo*. Remember, Balbus, labour omnia vincit, as the saying is.

[Two young girls appear in doorway at L.: CLAUDEN has long golden plaits and is dressed in blue; MORDRED has long black plaits and is dressed in scarlet. CLAUDEN carries a small earthenware pot, with some flowers in it.

BALBUS. Ave, mellæ! Enter. Centurio abest.

[Points off R.

MORDRED [calling off L.]. Come on, Mother; the room's free.

[CLAUDEN and MORDRED come timidly right into the room. CLAUDEN puts flowers on table R.C.

ASTEL. My, what lovely flowers!

MORDRED. Get on with your work, Astel, and don't have so much to say. [ASTEL takes candlestick and goes off L.

CLAUDEN [to BALBUS, touching helmet]. Galea?

BALBUS. Yes. Galea. [Teaching her names of plumbed crest and breastplate] Crista. Lorica.

CLAUDEN [repeating words]. Crista. Lorica. [Puts on helmet and strikes posture.] Look Mordred, civis Romanus sum.

BALBUS. No. You—girl, puella. Say, civis Romana sum.

[Enter HEADMAN'S WIFE at L. She has greying dark hair coiled round her head, and is dressed sombrely. She carries a pair of small curtains in the Celts' favourite colour—scarlet.

WIFE. Clauden! Take that off at once! What are you thinking about?

[CLAUDEN replaces helmet on table. Voice off R. calls, "Balbus." BALBUS goes off quickly.

MORDRED. Clauden's always with these Romans, learning Latin and becoming familiar.

WIFE. You should have more pride, Clauden. To learn the language of our conquerors is *infra dignitatem*.

CLAUDEN [*laughing*]. There! You're speaking Latin yourself.

WIFE. I don't lower myself by *learning* Latin. I just happen to pick it up—Latin is so very catching. Now come and help me with these curtains, both of you.

[*The three women babble excitedly as they fix the scarlet curtains to hang one each side of the opening in back wall. The curtains have a primitive design in black, and are on a string, so that they may be easily drawn together.*

[*ASTEL has entered and put candelabrum with lighted tallow candles on table—for the sunset has deepened. She now stands tense with excitement by fireplace, watching the fixing of the curtains. WIFE and daughters stand back to admire effect.*

There!

MORDRED. How beautiful!

CLAUDEN. It will please the Centurion.

ASTEL. It's lovely! What *elegantia*, as the saying is!

[*Enter CADWOL, the headman, from L., a tall, well-built man, with long hair and full beard, tinged with grey.*

WIFE. Cadwol, look at my curtains!

CADWOL. Wife, is this seemly? When we Iceni are mourning the death of our king, Prasutagus, when our good Queen Boadicea is left alone in the care of these dirty Romans, is that the time to think of curtains?

WIFE [*taking chair and sitting*]. I wanted to show the Centurion that we know how to live in good style.

[*MORDRED stands by her mother, CLAUDEN is near Roman chair, CADWOL moves to and fro L.*

CADWOL. Four generations of my family have lived in this house—and never a curtain. Are not our honest Iceni ways good enough for this Roman?

CLAUDEN. Mother wanted the Centurion to see you're not a *rusticus*—that we're not plebs.

CADWOL. *Rusticus . . . plebs!* Latin! It's not enough

to have to give up my best rooms to this Roman—my daughter picks up Latin! We don't want curtains to show we're not herds. Why, we've travelled, we've got an air.

WIFE. Every year we go to Colchester.

CADWOL. Camulodunum, woman, Camulodunum. And as a Druid I have made the pilgrimage to Stonehenge. On the way back I did Londinium. [*Pauses reflectively.*] Ah! [*Resuming*] No, curtains or not, we are as good as the Romans. I can't make out why they have sent this detachment of troops right out here to Swacking Bulphen. As headman I've always kept this hamlet tranquil. There's been no trouble in these parts since we burnt out a village of the Trinobantes—the time I brought back Astel.

MORDRED [*giggling*]. Was Astel all the spoils of war?

CADWOL. Yes, Astel was the loot. Ha, ha! [*They all turn, laughing, to look at ASTEL depreciatingly.*] As for the Romans, they are like a blight on the country. They have destroyed the sacred groves of the Druids; they forbid human sacrifices. And now my barns are full of loafing soldiers, and I am told to come into my own house by the back door.

MORDRED. No Latin for me! I like my own people.

CLAUDEN. So do I. But the Romans interest me. Look at this little square of mosaic. [*Points to mosaic at foot of chair on rostrum*] Balbus told me it is a piece of *pavimentum* from the Centurion's *dulcis domus*.

[CADWOL winces at the Latin.]

WIFE. Clauden, why must you use that dreadful language?

CADWOL. Speak your own tongue, or not at all.

CLAUDEN. That mosaic is from the floor of his father's mansion, so that wherever the Centurion goes his feet may rest on a little piece of home.

CADWOL. Pity he didn't stop there!

MORDRED. He comes to our country, and must have a fire in his room—in the summer. Fine men, the Romans!

CLAUDEN. Fine enough to conquer us.

CADWOL. They only conquered us because they fight unfairly. They protect themselves with armour, and fight behind fortifications. That is cowardly.

WIFE. They call us barbarians, but have they got Druids ?

CADWOL. Have they got mead ?

MORDRED. Have they got bearded oysters ?

CLAUDEN. They have other things.

WIFE. What other things ?

CLAUDEN. Why—er—water-clocks.

CADWOL. Water-clocks ! I don't know how the Romans would get on without water. [*Off R. there is the sound of water being poured into a bath.*] There's that young Centurion washing again. Every day.

[*Loud splashing off R., and the CENTURION'S voice uplifted in song.*]

WIFE. Three times a day !

ASTEL [*butting in excitedly*]. He washes all over—Balbus told me so—he washes in *puris naturabilis*.

WIFE. That will do, Astel.

ASTEL. That's what he said. Those were Balbus's very own *ipsissima verba*.

CADWOL. Astel, I won't have Latin from *you*. Get out ! [*ASTEL scurries off L.*] There is nothing new in the idea of bathing. [*CENTURION'S song, amidst splashing of water, swells up again.*] We have baths too. It is part of our religion. Every good Druid amongst the Iceni has a bath on May Day, when the sun enters Taurus. But there is a great difference between bathing as a religious observance and making a foolish habit of it, like these Romans.

MORDRED. We have nothing to learn from the Romans.

CLAUDEN. They have books . . . writings . . . poetry.

CADWOL. And have we no poetry, no Druid hymns ? [*intones*].

"The heat of the sun shall be wasted.

Yet shall the Britons have an inclosure of great renown."

[ASTEL creeps in and stands just inside door L.
ALL. "And the heights of Snowdon shall receive inhabitants."

CADWOL. "Then will come a spotted cow and procure a blessing."

ALL. "On the Serene Day she will bellow.
On the Eve of May shall she be boiled."

CADWOL. Can the Romans equal that?

CLAUDEN. Of course not! But some of their things are better. Their buildings. Why, the Capitoleum at Rome is three hundred paces long, and the roof is supported on many marble pillars, each thrice the girth of an oak-tree and twice as high. [Sceptical pause.

WIFE. Who told you all this?

CLAUDEN. The Centurion.

ASTEL [butting in excitedly]. And Balbus told me about the *elephanta*.

CADWOL. What on earth is an *elephanta*?

ASTEL. An *elephanta* is an animal twice as high as a horse, with two teeth a yard long and a nose two yards long.

WIFE. Nonsense! The girl can't be *compos mentis*.

MORDRED [giggling]. Latin, Mother, Latin!

CLAUDEN. Mother's as bad as I am.

WIFE. What I meant to say was that Astel can't be . . . she isn't—[MORDRED and CLAUDEN giggle afresh.] I wish you girls wouldn't mother me. I meant to say she's . . . she's— [Solving her difficulty by shouting at ASTEL] Astel, leave the room! [ASTEL runs off L.

CADWOL. There, Clauden; that will teach you not to be so simple as to believe everything these Romans tell you. Obviously there's no such animal as an *elephanta*, and just as there's no *elephanta*, so there is no Capitoleum.

CLAUDEN [mulishly]. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

WIFE. Latin again! I think you had better leave the room too, Clauden.

CADWOL. Let her stay and hear a word of warning.

Let Clauden be worthy of us as good Iceni. Let her remember that her father is an Elder of the Druids, soon to be a Bard. And that sooner or later we mean to cast off the Roman yoke.

WIFE. S-sh! Not so loud, Cadwol!

CADWOL [*softening his voice*]. All I say is, watch Beacon Hill. [*He points to hill seen through window.*] That is where the beacon has always burned to call us to fight for our liberty. Its light called my father's father out to stem the first coming of the Romans under Julius Cæsar himself. Its light called me out to resist the second coming of the Romans under Claudius. Its light called me out again to throw off the rule of that dirty Roman governor Ostorius Scapula. We didn't succeed, because we failed to act together. But next time there will be no mistake. Next time that beacon burns the whole country will be rising like one man. It is all arranged. So, remember, next time—

MORDRED. Next time.

CADWOL. Now leave me. [*Glaring at door R.*] If I may call my own room my own for a little while I want to learn by rote some Druid ritual. Let me know if my herdsman returns from the market.

[*WIFE and daughters go out L.*]

"Clad in white, with a chaplet of oak-leaves on the brow,

In the face of the moon, and in the eye of the Light,

Then shall the plant be cut, the sacred mistletoe.

Then shall the plant be cut, with a golden sickle

Shaped like the moon when it is six nights old.

Then shall the—"

[*BALBUS enters unceremoniously R.*]

BALBUS [*breezily*]. *Senex*—old man—*permitte*. *Centurio*—supper. [*Calls L. loudly.*] Astel, supper!

CADWOL. To think that I, headman of Swacking Bulphen, should be treated so: not allowed to use my own front door, turned out of my best room by Roman barbarians.

BALBUS [*cleaning table of armour*]. Barbarians, no, old man. Iceni barbarians, Romans good.

CADWOL. Don't call me 'old man.' I'm as good as six Romans, without their armour.

BALBUS. You Iceni—*vulgares*. No wash, *nunquam*.

CADWOL. Oh, if I could talk Latin I would tell you something! [*Calling through door L.*] Clauden, Clauden! [*Her voice is heard replying.*] What is the Latin for pig? Eh? Oh, any kind of pig will do! [*Her voice is heard.*] Porcus? [*He turns on BALBUS.*] There, that's what you are—*porcus*, Roman *porcus*!

BALBUS [*grinning good-humouredly*]. Roman *porcus* good, old man. Plenty fight. Finish Gallia, finish Belgica, finish Germania. Soon—finish all Britannia.

CADWOL [*spluttering*]. Oh, I'd like to . . . I wish I could. . . . [*Loudly and slowly*] Romans no *bonum*! [*This fails to annoy BALBUS.*] If only I knew Latin better! [*Tries again.*] Nero no *bonum*. [*This also is without effect.*] Anyhow, I will use my own front door. [*At door: fresh inspiration.*] And, what's more, Julius Caesar was no *bonum*.

[*This making no impression at all on BALBUS,*
CADWOL goes out into the night, slamming
the door.

BALBUS [*laughing*]. Exit Cadwol.

[*Enter ASTEL L., with crude crocks, which she sets out on table.*

ASTEL. Aren't the curtains beautiful, Balbus? [*He does not understand; pointing*] Curtains, curtains.

BALBUS. Curtains—*vela*. [*Without enthusiasm*] Very nice. [*Ingratiatingly*] Astel, *ancilla pulchra*, beautiful servant.

ASTEL. Whoy, what's come over you, Balbus? Just now I was *elephanta*; now I'm *pulchra*. You want something, I shouldn't wonder.

BALBUS. Yes. Mead. Give mead, Astel.

ASTEL. I thought so. You ask me for mead *ad nauseam*. You know it's risky; you know they measure

every drop. You know the *domina* doesn't make mead *pro bono publico*.

BALBUS. You do it before. *Facile est*—easy. [*Mimes stealthy action.*] *Be circumspecta.*

ASTEL. I know how to get mead. There's no need for you to show me the *modus operandi*. I've done it often enough, and *experientia docet*, as the *dictum* is.

BALBUS. You go, Astel *pulcherrima*?

ASTEL [*giving in*]. I'll try. Do you get a mug while I'm gone.

[ASTEL, *having first peeped cautiously through doorway L., slips out.* BALBUS gets himself a red earthenware handle-less mug from table up L., and comes to C. Re-enter ASTEL with an earthenware jar.

I've got it, Balbus. [*Pouring out mead*] But I doubt you don't know the risk I'm running.

BALBUS [*drinking*]. Astel *pulchra*, *te saluto*.

[*Sits on chair by table.*

ASTEL. That's all very well. Supposing the *domina* misses her precious mead, supposing one of the young *dominas* catches me in *flagrante delicto*!

BALBUS. You say—for Balbus. Mead for Balbus. Good man, very nice Roman.

ASTEL. Sing your own praises; blow your own *tuba*. It won't hurt you if I get a flogging.

BALBUS. Flogging for you, mead for me; good it is.

ASTEL. You wouldn't say that if it was *vice versa*. Ah, well, so long as you enjoy yourself roight tidily.

BALBUS [*holding out mug*]. *Aliud da, et idem*. Same again.

ASTEL. No, no.

BALBUS. Astel, Astel *pulcherrima*, *bis dat quæ cito dat*. Twice she gives who soon she gives. *Comprehende*?

ASTEL. I *comprehende* the part about giving twice.

[*She slowly pours a little mead into his mug.*

BALBUS. More. [*Gestures to heighten the level of mead in mug.*] *Excelsior, excelsior*!

ASTEL. No, Balbus.

[He seizes her wrist, and forces her to fill mug.

BALBUS. Again, Astel, te saluto. [Noise off R.

ASTEL. Cave Centurion.

BALBUS [drinking up quickly]. Nunc est bibendum.

[BALBUS put chair in its place above table. ASTEL creeps hurriedly off L. Enter CENTURION R. He carries a tablet and a book. He goes to warm himself at the fire. BALBUS, clapping his hands :

Astel, supper !

[CENTURION seats himself above table. Enter ASTEL L., with a plate, upon which she puts a portion from the pot by the fire. BALBUS goes off R., and reappears at once with an amphora of wine and a drinking-horn for the CENTURION. Throughout the meal BALBUS acts as butler.

CENTURION. What is that, Astel ?

ASTEL. Boiled columba ; very good.

[Puts plate before him.

CENTURION. Columba—dove.

ASTEL. No, pigeon. [CENTURION notes this on tablet.

CENTURION. Columba—pigeon. These flowers, what you call them ?

ASTEL. Love-lies-bleeding.

CENTURION [making a note]. *Amarantus caudatus*—love-lies-bleeding. Love—amor. [Sudden thought] Astel, who these flowers here put ?

ASTEL. One of the young *dominas*.

CENTURION. Dark-haired young *domina*, or—

ASTEL. No, not Mordred. Not that lummocking girl !

CENTURION. What is "lummocking" ?

ASTEL. It's . . . it's . . . You wouldn't comprehend, Centurion. It was Clauden put the flowers.

CENTURION. Ah, Clauden. *Auricoma*—golden-haired one ! Astel, mistress and daughters here to come, I invite. Go ! [ASTEL flies off L. To BALBUS] Lummocking, *quid significat* lummocking ?

BALBUS. Lummocking . . . lummocking . . . O centurio, *sine dubitatione verbum barbarum*.

[WIFE comes in L., in the role of a matron, with a treasured daughter under each wing.

CENTURION. Ave! Be seated. When *solus* I am unhappy. Be willing to share my *solitudinem*.

WIFE. I am honoured, Centurion. [She sits in chair L., with CLAUDEN and MORDRED on low stools R. and L. close beside her.] I hope you are comfortable in my poor *domicilium*.

CENTURION. I give thanks.

WIFE. I hope you keep well.

CENTURION. Yes. But in my joints much pain always I suffer.

WIFE. It is this cold, damp summer. I must give you a family supple. It is never known to fail. Mordred, pass me that little jar. [MORDRED passes a rough pot from side-table.] Take this powder, Centurion, night and morning—enough to cover a small coin.

CLAUDEN [taking pot to CENTURION]. Enough to cover a *denarius*. [Lingering] Oh, a book! A real book!

CENTURION. Yes, Julius Cæsar wrote it.

CLAUDEN [daring to touch it]. Writing! What does that say [pointing to a line]?

CENTURION. *Gallia in tres partes divisa est*. You comprehend?

CLAUDEN. Gaul is divided into three parts.

WIFE. Clauden, come and sit down. You mustn't worry the Centurion.

[CLAUDEN unwillingly resumes her seat. Enter ASTEL L., excitedly bringing a plate of oysters to the CENTURION.

ASTEL. Oysters, bearded oysters!

CENTURION. *Ostrei*! Good to be eaten.

ASTEL. Yes, *Ostrei* with *barba* very *bonum* for Roman Centurion.

CENTURION. Astel, good cook you are. Time will come, Balbus from the army having been discharged, on his farm wife he will require.

ASTEL [*pleased ; with a guffaw*]. Whoy, Balbus ain't never a farmer, surely ? Balbus couldn't draw a straight furrow, I doubt. And what woman would want such a little runt of a man ?

[*She takes the dirty plate of first course, and dashes off L. with a whoop of laughter.*

CENTURION [*puzzled, taking up tablet*]. "Little runt of a man." Little, *parvus* ; of a man, *hominis* ; runt . . . runt . . . What is runt ?

WIFE. Astel is very ignorant, Centurion.

MORDRED. She's a Trinobante. Just cattle !

CENTURION. Always speech of Astel difficult to be understood it is.

CLAUDEN. She merely meant a little man—*homunculus*.

CENTURION [*making a note*]. Little runt of a man—*homunculus*. *Circuitus verborum*.

MORDRED [*aside*]. Mother, why doesn't he notice our curtains ?

WIFE [*aside*]. Patience, child ; he's a man.

BALBUS [*pouring wine, aside*]. *Vela admirari utile est*. *Vela*, curtains.

CENTURION [*after stealthy look*]. Ah ! Those curtains I admire. I give thanks.

WIFE. We are, of course, accustomed to curtains. But I thought that you, a soldier, might think them womanly.

CENTURION. Elegant they are. In Rome I imagine myself. [*Rises.*] Let us have *symposium*. You comprehend *symposium* ? Wine, talk, song. Balbus, *vinum da*.

[BALBUS serves wine to the women from the amphora, MORDRED having fetched earthenware mugs from side-table L. CENTURION sits on Roman chair on rostrum. He raises his drinking-horn and drinks to the women, and they sip coyly from their mugs. ASTEL has returned, and stands unobtrusively just inside door L., a delighted spectator.]

To you, good health ; to country of Icení, prosperity. Be unwilling only as conquerors Romans to regard. With gifts of law, order, peace, and justice to small nations we come.

WIFE [*guardedly*]. You have much that we admire.

CENTURION. First guidance, then alliance, not only by treaty, but by blood ; for where soldiers are stationed there, their service ended, they are discharged ; and where they are discharged they marry. [*His eye resting on CLAUDEN*] Beautiful girls, to marry Roman Conquerors, often are not afraid.

WIFE. Very often that is so.

CENTURION. All this Icení comprehend, and trust us. For your King himself, Prasutagus, being about to die, to Roman guardianship Queen Boadicea entrusted.

MORDRED. That is true. A traveller from Camulodunum told us that yesterday.

CENTURION. Guardianship will be arranged when the *legatus*, Suetonius Paulinus, returns. He is in Wales.

WIFE. They are bad people in Wales.

CLAUDEN. But I hear they are worse in Caledonia.

MORDRED. Yes, they say the Scots are very wild.

CENTURION. Suetonius Paulinus faithful trustee to Queen Boadicea will be.

WIFE. I saw Queen Boadicea once.

MORDRED. } And I.

CLAUDEN. } We all saw her.

WIFE. She had bright yellow hair reaching down to her girdle, a great gold collar, and a tunic of many colours. Her mantle floated in the breeze as she rode in her chariot. Ah, Queen Boadicea !

CENTURION [*getting tablet ready*]. Boadicea—what means that name ?

CLAUDEN. In Latin, Centurion, Boadicea means *victoria*.

WIFE. Queen Boadicea, Queen Victoria ! She had an eight-foot spear in her right hand and a sheaf of javelins in her left. The dear Queen ! Bronze scythe-

blades were on the hubs of her wheels, and her chariot was drawn by three horses.

CLAUDEN. The shaft-horse was a skewbald, and the two wheelers blue roans.

MORDRED [*with a superior laugh*]. Blue roans, Clauden? They were strawberry roans.

CLAUDEN. They were blue roans.

MORDRED. Strawberry roans.

CLAUDEN. Blue roans.

WIFE [*sharply*]. Whatever are you thinking of, Clauden? Of course they were strawberry roans! They were strawberry roans, Centurion.

[*The CENTURION smiles politely, and lays his tablet aside in despair.*]

MORDRED [*going into a fit of giggles*]. Fancy mistaking strawberry roans for blue roans!

CENTURION [*to ease situation*]. Wine, talk, we have had. Now song let us have.

WIFE. Yes. Clauden, sing us a song.

CLAUDEN [*protesting unconvincingly*]. Oh, Mother, I couldn't! I don't know anything.

WIFE. Yes, you do. Sing, "On the bay with the silver points."

CLAUDEN [*singing*].

"Bardicco is mounted and rides to the war."

ALL WOMEN [*clapping hands and beating out a rhythm*].

"On the bay with the silver points."

CLAUDEN. "Thirsty and keen is the sword at his hip."

ALL WOMEN. "On the bay with the silver points."

CLAUDEN. "Ten arrows he carries for ten of the foe."

ALL WOMEN. "On the bay with the silver points."

CLAUDEN. "The mountains he crosses; the rivers he swims."

ALL WOMEN. "On the bay with the silver points."

[*The singing is stopped by abrupt entry of CADWOL at door back. He looks sullen.*]

CENTURION. Ave, Cadwol, headman.

CADWOL. Ave, Centurion.

CENTURION. Why at that door without permission you enter ?

CADWOL. Centurion, I heard the singing and hurried in, for it is not right to sing festive songs at this time. The Iceni nation are mourning the death of their king.

CENTURION. Another door there is. It is not allowed at that door to enter.

CADWOL. I was in a hurry, Centurion. The singing shocks our people, especially from this house, the house of their headman.

CENTURION. Enough. To-night, although song is unbecoming, yet wine and talk permissible are. Balbus, *vinum da*.

[BALBUS serves CADWOL, who remains standing.

He goes to replenish glasses of WIFE and daughters.

WIFE. No. No . . . well, just a little. Mordred, Clauden, no more. [All drink respectfully to CENTURION.

CADWOL. Centurion, there are bad rumours in the village.

CENTURION. What rumours ?

CADWOL. My herdsman has returned from the market at Hatching Tye, and a man came in there who said that he had been told in Hatching Tawney by a man who came from farther east that there have been evil doings in Camulodunum.

CENTURION [*amused*]. What evil doings in Colchester ?

CADWOL. They say that in Camulodunum the Romans seized and bound Queen Boadicea——

WIFE. Oh !

CADWOL. Flogged her, and then looted her palace and stole her treasure.

CLAUDEN [*reproachfully*]. Oh, Centurion, is this what you told me—*civilitas successit barbarum* ?

CADWOL. What does that mean ?

CLAUDEN. Civilization replaces barbarism.

[CADWOL's family all begin talking at once.

CENTURION [*knocking for silence*]. Let us be calm. Man tells man that another man has said that this and

that he has been told. Therefore we believe? No. Not thus truth comes.

[Through the dark opening in back wall suddenly a beacon can be seen to flare up. In the room they are all unaware of this.]

Be assured that in Colchester all is well. I speak to you as one whose news direct and quickly comes, not through lying mouth to lying mouth. All is well. Suetonius Paulinus is in Wales, but while absent none to harm Queen Boadicea will dare.

CADWOL. The people believe the rumour.

[CLAUDEN rises to put mugs on side-table.]

CENTURION. Cadwol, headman, tranquil to keep them your duty is. Even if this rumour be true *[smiling at possibility]* patience let them have. Let them await return of Suetonius Paulinus.

[CLAUDEN, moving along back wall, notices the beacon. She stands irresolute, then draws curtains quietly.]

If wrong has been done swift to avenge he will be. But if people rise up then Suetonius Paulinus will punish, and those who your Queen have maltreated, being forgotten during revolt, too late justice will receive.

CADWOL. I will tell them.

CENTURION. It is well. But, be assured, no outrage has occurred. *[CLAUDEN, with intention, yawns noisily.]* Tired, auricoma? Late it is. *[He rises with a gesture of dismissal.]* Until to-morrow.

[ASTEL slips out L., CADWOL and his family follow ceremoniously, with CLAUDEN in rear. At door, unobserved, she turns and comes to]
CENTURION.

CLAUDEN. Oh, Centurion, it is true!

CENTURION *[smiling]*. And you too believe it, auricoma?

[CLAUDEN runs to window and draws back curtains]

CLAUDEN. Look! Now you must believe.

CENTURION. That is nothing. Druids perhaps. Religious sacrifices.

CLAUDEN. No, no, it is a beacon. A war beacon. Look, there is another and another. A chain of beacons!

[CENTURION looks left and right through the opening, and gives a low whistle of surprise.

CENTURION. *Balbus, centuria paret.*

[BALBUS opens door, back, and blows softly three short blasts and one long on a whistle. It is answered by two short blasts, and sound of activity (off) follows. BALBUS then closes door, crosses stage, and goes swiftly off R.

It is true, it is true. Beacons, many beacons. Whole people in revolt. [He goes to his armour and rapidly puts it on.] Clauden—*auricoma*—now Romans you hate?

CLAUDEN. Our Queen! Can such treachery be forgiven?

CENTURION. No. Fools, fools, fools! No words I have. Now your hatred we merit. But why warn me? Why tell me that beacon burns? [She does not answer.] Why, *auricoma*?

CLAUDEN. Perhaps . . . perhaps there is just one Roman I would not wish to be murdered in his bed.

CENTURION. Grateful I am, *auricoma*. Remember—

CLAUDEN. Oh, hurry, hurry, Centurion. While there is yet a chance, slip away towards Londinium.

CENTURION. No. Towards Colchester I go.

CLAUDEN. But don't you understand, it is death? The whole population between is in arms. It is death that way.

CENTURION. Also it is duty that way.

[BALBUS comes in R., fully armoured. He rapidly puts book and tablets in a small leather sack, then the pieces forming mosaic square on the rostrum. As he comes to where CLAUDEN is standing three or four pieces of mosaic fall from the sack. Picking them up hastily, one escapes his notice.

BALBUS. O Clauden, *vale dico*. Tell Astel, soon

return. Astel give mead. Plenty mead.

[He goes, door at back.

CENTURION [*musingly*]. Clauden . . . that golden hair in Rome . . . what envy . . . what despair! [*Putting on helmet*] *Eheu! Jacta est alea.*

CLAUDEN. Yes, the die is cast.

CENTURION [*at door; with a smile*]. *Ave atque vale, auricomia. Moriturus te saluto.* [*He goes.*

[*She goes impulsively to window and looks after him.*

WIFE'S VOICE [*off L.*]. Clauden! Clauden!

CLAUDEN. I'm coming.

[*She comes down stage, pausing at C. with her eye on the CENTURION'S chair. Observing the coloured square of mosaic on the floor, she picks it up and handles it caressingly. Then, putting it in the bosom of her dress, she goes slowly off L.*

CURTAIN

NOTES AND EXERCISES

NOTE.—Plays may be roughly divided into three classes: (i) those founded upon an artificial story or theatrical situation, (ii) those founded upon a natural story which is largely shaped by the understanding of human character, (iii) those founded upon an idea or a thesis. Farce and melodrama belong to the first group, great comedy and tragedy to the second, and didactic plays (including a number of fantasies, allegorics, domestic or sociological dramas, and problem plays) to the third. The groups tend to overlap or to fuse, so that a rigid classification is often impossible.

WOMEN AT WAR

1. Describe the subject of the play in fewer than fifty words. Would you say that it originated from a situation, a character-study, or from an idea which the author wished to dramatize?

2. Mention the titles of any historical novels dealing with this period.

3. Do you consider that the playwright has been fair to both parties?

4. Give a brief account of each character in turn, and indicate the two who are most outstanding.

5. The coming of news of a great battle is naturally dramatic. Can you give other examples from poems, novels, or other plays?

6. Although no men appear in the play (since they are away from home) the play would be meaningless without the 'invisible background' of men and battlefields. Do you agree that in a war play for men only (like "Journey's End") there is an equal degree of consciousness of the feminine background?

7. Would it be right to regard "Women at War" as an anti-war play?

8. Discuss the dramatic value of the final incident.

THE DYE-HARD

1. Would you say that Mr Brighthouse began with an idea, a situation, or a study of character? Or are the 'motives' interfused?

2. Explain the struggle which takes place within Tom's mind, and also how the various characters contribute to make it more intense.

3. Consider how the playwright prepared the audience for Tom's ultimate decision. Give examples.

4. What is the symbolical significance of cricket in this play?

5. Write an imaginary dialogue between Susan and Mrs Butterworth on the occasion of their next meeting.

6. Describe your impressions of the Lancashire dialect. How would a sentence like "Think on those trousers are done by I come down" be expressed in (a) King's English, (b) any other dialect which you happen to know?

7. Write a short essay on one of the following subjects:

(a) Loyalty.

(b) The Influence of Machinery.

(c) Die-hards.

AUGUSTUS IN SEARCH OF A FATHER

1. At which moment in the play did you suspect the truth about Augustus? Would the play have been more satisfying (a) if the father had recognized his son's face, (b) if the father had overheard the final word?

2. What is meant by saying that the watchman and policeman are real characters, not merely conventional figures?

3. Compare the watchman with the familiar character in the short stories of W. W. Jacobs.

4. Make an attempt at analysing the character of Augustus's father, with special reference to his ideas concerning right and wrong. (Is he consistent, for example? Is his mind an organized unity or simply a patchwork?)

5. Read "The Return of the Prodigal," by St John Hankin, and compare Eustace with Augustus.

6. Bearing in mind the proverbial saying "Like father, like son," how might it be possible to account for the failure of Augustus? Make four or five suggestions.

7. What are the essential differences between a play and a fragment of life?

8. How would you classify this play?

THE WORKHOUSE WARD

1. Make a list of the accusations which the two men bring against each other. (Not more than twelve each.)
2. Study the dialect used in the play, and describe its main characteristics.
3. Compare the theme of the play with that of "Friends," by Herbert Farjeon (included in the third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*).
4. What is meant by 'unconscious humour'? Can you quote any examples of (a) wit, (b) conscious humour, from "The Workhouse Ward"?
5. Explain the meaning of 'banshee.'
6. Discuss the 'psychology' of the play, and say whether you consider the temperaments of the two protagonists to be peculiarly Irish.
7. Compare the play with "Acid-drops," by Gertrude Jennings.

MR SAMPSON

1. Mention three plays in which a man is compelled to choose between two women, and three others in which a woman has to choose between two men.
2. Do you consider that Mr Sampson's dilemma is made to appear credible? Give your opinion on the tossing of the coin and its unusual result.
3. Compare the West Country dialect with the Irish dialect of Lady Gregory and with the Lancashire dialect used by Mr Brighouse.
4. Discuss the ending of the play. Would any other 'solution' have been satisfactory?
5. Compare Caroline's speech to the clock with the girl's soliloquy at the opening of "Waterloo," by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (included in the second series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*), and say which is the more convincing. Could the necessary information have been conveyed to the audience in a more plausible manner?
6. Describe the chief differences between the characters of Caroline and Catherine Stevens.

THE LONDONDERRY AIR

1. What adjectives would you employ to describe the melody which gives the title to this play?
2. Explain what evidences appear in the play that the action took place (a) in America, (b) in the early nineteenth century.
3. Compare the pedlar's speech with that of Hiram.
4. Do you agree with the girl's decision? If so, do you recall what happened to Prunella? (If this alarms you try to imagine married life with Hiram!)
5. Why is danger so alluring, and security so rarely attractive? (Subject for discussion.)
6. Write a poem or a passage of poetic-prose in praise of the violin.

THE POISON PARTY

1. What is the difference between a burlesque and a farce? Give the names of any serious plays which have recently been burlesqued in the production.
2. Which part of the play may be described as 'exposition'? Make a list of the moments of crisis that follow, and criticize the construction.
3. Compare "The Poison Party" with "Lucrezia Borgia's Little Party," by A. J. Talbot (see *The Best One-Act Plays of 1933*).
4. Write an imaginary conversation which might have taken place after the play between (a) the Queen-mother and the Cardinal or (b) Denise and her father.
5. Tell the story of any other one-act play by Mr Sladen-Smith, and discuss his sense of humour.
6. Suggest other possible subjects for burlesque.

THE DUMB WIFE OF CHEAPSIDE

NOTE.—The original story in Rabelais is extremely short—little more than a page—and relates the bare incidents. Mr Ashley Dukes had the task of elaborating the characters and creating most of the dialogue. The ending, however, is different. The original runs thus:

"Some time after, the Doctor asked for his Fee of the Husband; who answered, That truly he was deaf, and so was not able to understand what the tenure of his Demand might be. Whereupon the Leech bedusted him with a little, I know not what, sort of Powder; which rendered him a Fool immediately: so great was the stultifying Vertue of that strange kind of pulverised Dose. Then did this Fool of a Husband, and his mad Wife, joyn together, falling on the Doctor and the Surgeon, did so scratch, bethwack, and bang them, that they were left half dead upon the place, so furious were the Blows which they received: I never in my Life-time laughed so much as at the acting of that Buffoonery."

1. What do you know about Rabelais?
2. Mention any other plays or stories in which the alleged loquacity of a woman provided the popular humour.
3. The creating of the wife's torrential speech was the work of Mr Dukes. Do you consider that he chose the right subjects? Can you suggest any other subjects which would have been equally effective?
4. The play is exceptionally long for a single act. Can you discover any speeches which could be cut without serious loss? Are there any unnecessary characters?
5. Explain why the final 'twist' in the plot is important. Why does it remind one of "*Rory Aforesaid*," by John Brandane (see the third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*)? Do you think the incident quoted above would have made a better 'curtain'? Give reasons for your answer.
6. What are the special requirements in a play intended for broadcasting? Why is "*The Dumb Wife of Cheapside*" more suitable than "*Women at War*"? Which other plays in this collection might be broadcast with little change?

THE GREAT GLOBE ITSELF

1. Give a short account of the Elizabethan theatre.¹
2. State what you know about the rival companies of Burbage and Alleyn. If Shakespeare had written plays for the latter in which ways would they probably have differed from the plays we know?

¹"What would strike a modern eye most about Shakespeare's theatre was its smallness. The auditorium of the Globe was

3. Mention eight Elizabethan dramatists, and give the names of any two plays by each.

4. Say what you think of Ben Jonson's criticisms of Shakespeare. Explain what he meant by the "unities," and (if possible) say something about the influence of dramatic theories upon the playwrights of France and England.

5. Explain the reference to the marriage of Princess Elizabeth

6. What do you think of Burbage's opinion of "The Tempest"?

7. Read "The Tempest," and indicate which scenes Mr Walker has used for "The Great Globe Itself."

8. Read "The Rehearsal," by Maurice Baring, and "Will Shakespeare," by Clemence Dane.

THE CENTURION'S BILLET AT SWACKING BULPHEN

1. How would you classify this play?

2. Make a list of a dozen other well-known Latin phrases which might have been used in the play.

3. Have you any criticisms to make of (a) the accuracy of historical detail, (b) the structure of the play as a whole?

4. Discuss the setting and costumes from a producer's point of view.

5. According to French critics, the humour of the theatre may be divided into three classes—viz., *le mot d'esprit*, *le mot de situation*, *le mot de caractere*. To which class does Mr Talbot's humour belong in this play? Give examples of other forms from the preceding plays in the collection.

6. Say what you think about the ending of the play, and explain the reference to Queen Boadicea and her revolt against the Romans.

probably about 55 feet square—that is, approximately the size of a lawn-tennis court—and this included the stage, which jutted right out among the audience, and was some 43 feet wide by about 27 feet long. The play was therefore performed almost in the middle of the theatre, the groundlings standing on three sides of the stage, which was raised three or four feet off the floor, while the seats for those who could afford them were ranged in three tiers of galleries round the walls."—*The Essential Shakespeare*, by J. Dover Wilson, Chapter II.

